Intelligence Exchange

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Intelligence Exchange

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Doctor Hannibal Lecter has always had a fascination with the darker side of Psychology. It may or may not have had anything to do with the fact that he, himself, was a serial killer. When he is given the chance to speak with an elusive subject, another killer, he is interested. Even more so after meeting his new patient.

Patient

The security doors shut firmly behind Hannibal, and he walked purposefully down the corridor. Of all the cells in the hall, there was one that offered no sound of it's own to add to the cacophony of noise that echoed into his ears. This was his destination, he presumed.

When he stopped just outside of the cell, his eyes found the still form that lay on the bed with perfect relaxation, despite obviously being alert.

"Hello. I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter," he introduced himself, deciding the man was either going to answer or not, and there was nothing for it.

The man opened his eyes, but stared at the ceiling.

"I wonder what you must have done to be asked to come here," The man said, his voice calm, and only a bit curious.

Hannibal did not reply, waiting for the man to continue. He could see the man would say more, and he wanted to know what.

"See, they don't send in the psychiatrists they like. Not anymore. They send the ones that make trouble, or are new and proud, who need their ego knocked down a notch. You certainly aren't new, and you don't seem arrogant, so you must have done something they don't like."

The man pivoted on his hip, turning his body ninety degrees and sitting up on the mattress. He still did not look at Hannibal, instead setting his gaze on the sink across the cell from himself.

Hannibal nodded.

"As astute as your observations are, I am not being punished. I was curious about you. I am here by my own accord."

That drew the man's attention, but not his gaze. He lifted an eyebrow and the corner of his mouth twitched up in an aborted smile.

"Oh? Then maybe I was wrong. You must be proud. Have you not been told what happens to the others?"

Hannibal tipped his head, studying the man before him. He was scruffy and unkempt, though that could be attributed to his current situation. He sat with perfect confidence, as if nothing in the world could touch him. He was not a large man, by any standards, but his presence could command a room if he chose.

"They either quit, or behave in a manner that requires their immediate removal from the atmosphere," Hannibal recited.

Oh yes, he had been told. That was part of what had intrigued him so. There had been plenty of clever criminals in his time, but none this well adept at their craft. This man had something in his head that Hannibal had never seen before, and he was eager to get his fingers into that skull and find out what it was.

The man smiled, closing his eyes and tipping his head back as if remembering a pleasant spring day.

“A few of them became *quite* violent,” he said, “I heard one of them nearly killed her own fiancee, though of course news travels slowly in this place.”

Hannibal had been given all the grisly details of every violent action taken by his previous psychiatrists. Whatever he had said to them, he had been very precise and convincing.

“I imagine it does,” Hannibal replied.

“Would you like to sit?” The man asked, suddenly, “I am sure Matthew would be glad to bring a chair for you.”

Hannibal smiled. The possession of manners was another thing that was scarce in most patients in this environment. He offered a polite nod in reply.

The man stood and walked to the bars, still not setting his eyes on Hannibal. Instead, he stared at the other side of the hallway, over Hannibal’s shoulder.

“Matthew,” he called, his voice not very loud, but carrying well, “Doctor Lecter would like to sit. Would you bring him a chair?”

There was a slight shuffle of movement near the security doors and footsteps approached. Hannibal did not turn to acknowledge the sounds, nor the man who set a chair out for him.

“Thank you,” the man said, earning a nod from Matthew.

Hannibal nodded to his patient in thanks before he seated himself on the chair.

“I apologize for not offering sooner. It is very rare any of my visitors wait for it. *You* are a man who appreciates proper etiquette.”

Hannibal didn't bother to hide the small smile that pulled at his lips.

“You sound as if you are certain of my nature, despite having only met me mere moments ago,” he said, intrigued.

The man nodded, his eyes tracing the pattern of bricks on the wall, though he probably had it memorized by then.

“You're Lithuanian. You are a man of taste, surrounding yourself with fine wines and meals with multiple courses. You are well traveled, and have an eye for the fine arts. You probably attend operas and ballets frequently, and you are friendly but distant. You have many people

who would call you friend, but few who have earned that title in return. I can *see you*, Doctor Lecter. Now what will you do about it?"

Hannibal's smile grew.

"You're not fond of eye contact," he replied, earning a confused smile from the other man. His eyebrows twitched with interest, but his eyes remained fixed on the wall.

"Eyes can be distracting," he said, his voice running like a gentle stream through the air, "for both parties. I don't need to make eye contact to understand who I am talking to. I only need to make eye contact to let them see what I want to show them."

Hannibal nodded.

"What is it you would like to show me?" He wondered aloud, tipping his head to establish curiosity.

The man huffed a laugh, and for the first time during their conversation, he met Hannibal's gaze. His vibrant eyes swirled with electric colors, ranging from green to blue to grey, and would not let Hannibal tear his own eyes away.

"Your eyes are an interesting color," the man purred, "most see them as brown, maybe golden, but in this place, right now, they seem like blood red pools. I think they hide far more than anyone would guess."

Hannibal was hooked. He knew the man had intended that, but he was far too interesting a man to let escape him.

"You have pure empathy," Hannibal breathed.

This caught the man off guard, his bright eyes sparkling as he smiled.

"Well, Doctor Lecter, I'm sure you will do just fine as my new psychiatrist. You're far more interesting than our good Fredrick Chilton. Though you should know he'll be listening to and watching all of this later. He's a bit possessive of me, I'm afraid."

Hannibal nodded. He had had an inclination, knowing Fredrick as well as he did.

"You are to be his star patient, I would guess," Hannibal mused, "he has the opportunity to observe and treat what he considers to be a true psychopath, yet you will not speak with him. I wonder why that is."

The man turned his eyes back to the wall, seemingly uninterested in the turn of conversation.

"Fredrick is a simple man. He enjoys money and fame. He doesn't discriminate between methods of obtaining those, which leads to him making some poor decisions. His desires blind him to logic and reason. I have no use of someone who leads their life motivated by such shallow values."

That was very apt of him. Hannibal, personally, had plenty of use for Fredrick, but he couldn't deny how tasteless he found the man to be. It was tiring work at times.

“Are people only permitted to speak with you if you have use of them?” Hannibal asked, genuinely curious.

“I speak to those whom I like,” the man corrected, “I use those whom I have use of.”

“I think Doctor Chilton might argue there is a fine line between talking and using, for you,” Hannibal retorted calmly.

The man nodded, slowly walking around his small cell.

“To him, both are nearly identical. I would not be surprised to find that he thinks there is no difference. I only use words for both, as I have few actions that could aid me at all. Words are my weapon of choice, you could say.”

Hannibal watched him walk, noting that he seemed fairly fit for having been incarcerated for so long. He must keep a routine to keep his muscles toned.

“I cannot but wonder what you might do to occupy your time here,” Hannibal said, though he thought he likely had a good idea.

The man stopped, turning his head to study Hannibal over his shoulder.

“I wouldn't mind having a few books,” he admitted, “but I have never been at the mercy of the world when it comes to my own entertainment. My mind contains all that is necessary for me.”

Hannibal wondered what his mind palace might look like. His own, built up of cathedrals and mansions, wasn't likely to be anything similar to that of this man.

“Your mind palace contains all the entertainment you require,” Hannibal concluded.

The man smirked, shaking his head and looking Hannibal over.

“I imagine your mind palace is vast,” he said, “constructed carefully of places you have been. Foreign places of great intrinsic value. Churches and Colosseums. That suits you quite well.”

Hannibal tipped his head curiously. This man truly had a remarkable gift of insight.

“I appear to be at a disadvantage,” Hannibal confessed, “you can see through my eyes and into my thoughts, but I must rely on your word concerning yourself.”

The man laughed, a clear laugh that didn't quite match his scruffy appearance.

“Very well. I suppose we should come to a deal,” he said, sitting back on the bed and placing his hands on his knees, “a sort of quid pro quo. I may ask you questions and receive an honest answer, and you may do the same in return. I promise to be truthful, and I expect the same from you. Would that suffice?”

Hannibal nodded. The man smiled, nodding in return.

“I think I would like to begin, as neither of us has asked many questions of the other,” the man said, “have all of my observations concerning you thus far been correct?”

Hannibal thought back, quickly flipping through what had been said.

“Yes. Your ability to observe and make connections is phenomenal. What is your mind palace constructed of?” Hannibal said, taking his turn in the game.

The man closed his eyes and tipped his head back, slipping deep into his mind.

“I have never used the term palace for my mind,” he said distantly, “because it isn't quite appropriate for what it is. My mind contains a vast wild, with perhaps one or two structures within. I have never attached myself to any building so much as I have the outdoors.”

The bright eyes opened again and turned to Hannibal once more. The door at the end of the hall opened with a clang and they both stood in unison.

“Our time is up, I'm afraid,” the man said, “I do hope you come back soon. Thank you for your time, Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal nodded.

“Thank you, mister Graham. I think I likely will be returning.”

Will flashed a bright smile as Matthew walked Hannibal back to the doors, and Hannibal could hear him humming a quiet melody.

“Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal turned to meet Doctor Chilton, who approached him quickly from his office where he had likely been listening to everything that had been said. He must have manufactured some spare time just then.

“Fredrick,” he replied.

Chilton huffed when he stopped, catching his breath after the small exertion.

“You seem to have made a good impression on Will Graham,” he said.

Hannibal had noticed Chilton only ever referred to Will by his full name, never giving him a different title or choosing to use either his first or last name. Chilton wanted to objectify Will as much as he could, and his name was just the term he used to refer to him by. It made it easier to not feel hurt by his words, Hannibal assumed.

“Will has a very unique mind,” Hannibal said by way of agreement, “I think he finds me nearly as interesting as I find him.”

Chilton scoffed.

“That really would be news. He doesn't seem to find anyone interesting. Hopefully you're harder for him to manipulate than the others were.”

Hannibal hummed genially.

“It would certainly be unfortunate if he were able to influence me into becoming violent. I do not feel any inclination to change my behavior aside from doing more research into what led to his incarceration.”

Chilton nodded.

“I certainly think that would be to your advantage,” he said, “the story of Will Graham is one for the textbooks. There is still much to be learned from him, and that is why I was willing to allow you to attempt this. This could be groundbreaking for our field of study.”

“A shame he refuses to speak with you,” Hannibal noted, taking no small amount of pleasure in the way Chilton tensed his eyes and pressed his lips together. He enjoyed driving the nail in just a bit.

“Indeed. I think he resents the fact that I hold the keys to his freedom. We tried sodium tri pentothal on him once. He recited a poem in Cajun French.”

Hannibal suppressed his smile. That was terribly clever of him. Hannibal knew his reasoning wasn't so typical as Fredrick made it out to be, however. He would be able to see how much Fredrick wanted to be the one to make the discovery of what was in his mind, and he was purposefully withholding it. Will had the ability to hurt him in a nearly surgical move, and he did.

“His strength and willpower must be admired,” Hannibal said.

Chilton scoffed.

“I wouldn’t say it must, but you certainly may, if it pleases you. I consider it stubbornness and arrogance. He thinks he knows so much better than the rest of us. It's a clutch at control where he has none,” he said, feigning disinterest.

“If the actions of his previous psychiatrists tell us anything, I would say he certainly has some level of control from where he is,” Hannibal pointed out, causing Chilton more discomfort.

“Yes, well, I’m working to limit his control, however limited it may already be. I’d certainly sleep better if it was none.”

Hannibal smirked.

“Is there anything you believe I should know about my patient, before I leave today?” Hannibal asked, making it clear he was not going to stay for a longer chat.

Chilton huffed and hummed, thinking.

“He’ll use his teeth if you get too close to him. He’s bit off fingers before, when someone wasn’t careful enough. Stay away from the bars when you speak with him, and make sure you know exactly what he has done before you come back.”

Hannibal nodded, suppressing a smile at the thought of the man biting at exposed flesh that came too near.

“I most certainly shall,” Hannibal answered, letting himself out the doors.

Research

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With only a minimal amount of needling, Hannibal had been able to get copies of the security tapes for many significant parts of Will Graham's incarceration. This included many of his therapy sessions, and a few violent outbursts.

Hannibal had been allowed access to his files, and had read them studiously.

Will Graham had been convicted of several murders, and the evidence was marginal. Easily planted, if done correctly. Will had been treated for encephalitis, but the infection seemed to have left irreparable damage, because the killings did not stop after he was cured. The sequence of events was a bit muddled in a few reports, but Will had been caught, and had killed three officers during his arrest.

Will Graham had worked for the FBI before he was arrested.

Watching the tapes of Will's therapy sessions, Hannibal was struck by his calm demeanor. Looking at him, one would not think he was the type to bite off fingers, or attack anyone with his teeth. He behaved similarly to when he had spoken with Hannibal, and even when one of the therapists had approached the bars and put his hands through in a dangerous move, Will had not attacked.

The man gripped the bars, seemingly desperate to get a reaction from his patient. Will blinked up at him slowly from his seat on the bed. He spoke calmly, telling the man he would be removed if he did not back away from the bars, at the same time as an orderly walked down the hall to do just that.

The man attacked the orderly, despite the difference in stature. The man was small, and the orderly sturdy, so the attack only ended with a black eye and a bruised jaw for the orderly. The therapist was escorted off the premises, and Hannibal knew he would not return.

Hannibal wanted to find the footage of when Will Graham had been the violent one. There were many cases of his psychiatrists being violent, or having a mental break in the prison, but Hannibal was more curious about the man behind it all.

He finally found it, and was not disappointed.

Will Graham had been doing very well in his incarceration, apparently, because there was only one guard there when he had a routine medical examination. His white teeth were bared in perfect order and pleasantness as his sharp gaze watched the movements of everyone moving around him. The poor nurse was treated with all politeness and smiles until she touched his face to examine his eyes.

She laid her hands on either side of his jaw, index fingers gently placed below his cheekbones. Will's head turned sharply and took a finger off with a clean snap. Blood spurted, the nurse screamed, and Will spit out the digit onto the floor. Blood dribbled down his chin and he grinned up at the camera, with dark, sparkling eyes.

Hannibal stopped the footage at that moment. He peered at the image, tracing the lines of Will's face with his eyes.

Who had he been smiling to?

"You want to what?"

Chilton's indignance was more frustrating than anything. Hannibal had spoken concisely and calmly, explaining what he had intended, and there was very little room for misunderstanding.

"Will Graham has not caused you any trouble for several months, and I believe he will be motivated to continue his good behavior if you were to incentivize it. He expressed a desire for reading material, and I see that as a relatively harmless thing to use as an incentive."

Chilton was less upset at the idea, and more at the fact that he had not been the one to suggest it. He wanted to be the complete authority over what happened to, and was said about Will Graham.

"I will have to think about it," Chilton said, "I'm sure you have plenty you can do with him without having to bribe him."

Hannibal smiled, but he wished he could avoid interacting with Chilton any more.

"I have no lack of questions and discussion topics which I can share with him," Hannibal replied, "I simply hoped to encourage friendly participation."

Chilton nodded, waving Hannibal out.

"Then get on with your session, I have to take time to consider your suggestion."

Hannibal was all too happy to leave the office, though he was irked by Chilton acting so casually with him.

As he walked to the security door, Matthew looked up and noticed him. He immediately picked up a chair that had been leaning against the wall and opened the door.

"Mister Graham asked me to have a chair for you from now on," Matthew explained unprompted, "he must really like you. He usually makes the shrinks ask for a chair, or else just stand the entire time."

Hannibal nodded in thanks as Matthew set the chair down in front of Will's cell.

“Thank you for being so accommodating.”

Matthew nodded, glancing once to the man in the cell before he walked back down the hall and the door shut behind him.

Will Graham was sitting with his head leaned back and touching the wall behind him. His eyes were closed, but Hannibal knew he was listening. His dark hair had fallen away from his brow, leaving his forehead pale and exposed.

“You are very considerate for a killer,” Hannibal said.

Will smiled to himself, as if he had been reminded of a particularly clever joke.

“You have been nothing but polite to me. I see no reason to treat you as anything other.”

Hannibal nodded in thanks.

“You may sit. From today forward, I don’t expect you to wait for my permission. I am not actually the one in charge here,” Will said, turning to stare at the empty chair, “if you wait for my permission, I will allow you to stand.”

Hannibal smiled and took his seat, watching his patient with rapt attention.

“During our last session, you remarked that my eyes are curious,” Hannibal said, “yet you neglected to mention your own.”

Will picked up his head and raised an eyebrow.

“What do you think is curious about my eyes?” he asked, intrigued.

“They are not a constant color,” Hannibal replied, “They shift in shade from green to blue to grey. I cannot find any rhyme or reason to the governing of their change. It seems random.”

Will grinned wickedly and sat fully upright.

“Perhaps you are trying to fit them into a set of rules that they do not belong to,” he mused, “I have found that they can change as I change my mind.”

His eyes flashed bright green.

“As a sort of camouflage. That is where our differences begin.”

Hannibal tipped his head at the comment.

“What would you say our differences are?” he asked.

Will nodded. He had evidently expected that question.

“It begins with the eyes. Mine change to fit my environment, at my will. Yours are constant and betray your true nature, while keeping you hidden in plain sight. That reflects our difference in nature. I can blend in to the shadows and be unnoticed. You stand in the light

and are seen, but not studied as you are. Of course, we have other differences. You are a psychiatrist, and I have a general disdain for people in that profession. You are part of the high society, and I have never been invited to any sort of dinner party that included anything more than finger food from a store."

Hannibal was getting a mental image of who this man had been before his arrest. His scruffy appearance was not from his incarceration, but something he had always used as his feign to normalcy. He would have been isolated in both his personal life and his professional life. He would have been seen as odd, but not noteworthy.

"A shame we did not know each other before now," Hannibal remarked, "I would have liked to cook for you."

Will laughed, and it was a genuine, unguarded laugh. Hannibal had caught him off guard, and Will's laugh caught him off guard in return. Hannibal couldn't repress his own smile at the sound.

"I am not typically good company," Will replied, still smiling.

Hannibal nodded.

"If I were to find a way to procure some reading material for you, what would you request?" He asked, knowing it would bother Chilton, but not caring.

Will raised his eyebrows, his eyes turning deep blue and curious.

"That would be terribly impressive, were you able to," he said, thinking.

Will let his gaze scan up and down Hannibal's sitting form, and Hannibal wondered what he was thinking.

"I think I would like to see what you would choose for me," Will replied at last, "it would be an interesting test. You have proven you understand far more than most, so I think you could provide something worth my time."

Hannibal nodded, impressed. He had hoped to gain insight by what Will requested, but this would be far more interesting.

"Now, you have asked two questions, while I have only asked one. It is my turn in our game. Have you researched me?" Will asked, standing and facing the bars, tilting his chin up just a bit, as if in defiance.

Hannibal nodded.

"I received access to your files, as well as the footage of much of your time while incarcerated. I believe I have gleaned quite a bit from my studies."

Will smirked, seeming to be pleased.

"I imagine you have. There is some very interesting information included in my files."

Hannibal nodded.

“As for my turn, I have noticed your speech patterns do not typically match mine, though you speak as if we are the same person when I am here,” he said, “why do you mimic my speech patterns for our sessions?”

Will blinked.

“I do not often allow my speech patterns to match that of my company, though it happens. I expect you were more likely to find me interesting if I sounded as intelligent as you. I do not intend to fool you, but the connections my mind makes often show outwardly in that way.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I can imagine many have thought you to be making fun of them with your natural mimicry.”

Will nodded.

“My turn. Did you view the footage of the incident with that poor nurse?” he asked, keeping his gaze fixed on the bricks of the hall.

Hannibal nodded.

“I did. After seeing the rest of the footage of your stay, most would not have expected you to act such a way.”

Will huffed a quiet laugh, closing his eyes with a smile. Hannibal thought he must be remembering that day.

“My turn,” Hannibal said, “Who were you smiling to?”

He hadn’t planned to ask, but the game had been tantalizing, and the thought had itched at the back of his mind the entire session. He had wanted to know, and the game seemed an open invitation.

Will opened his eyes and met Hannibal’s gaze.

“You, Doctor Lecter.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the attention the first chapter got. It was pretty surprising. I hope I continue to entertain you. <3

Testing

“Listen. I know how you feel. You want to be seen as his friend, so he will be honest with you and work well under your care. I understand, but he has shown an inordinate interest in you, and I don’t know if I feel comfortable encouraging that type of relationship.”

Chilton was growing more frustrating to have to deal with.

“I am not doing this for my benefit,” Hannibal said, “This is an incentive, so that as his therapy progresses, I will be able to convince him not to cause you any more trouble. He may grow upset during the progression of our sessions, so this would be a safeguard for your protection.”

Chilton leaned back in his chair, steepling his fingers in an attempt to seem omnipotent.

“Alright, listen,” he said at last, “I will allow him to have one book, but you must give it to me in advance so that I may be sure it is safe for him to receive. I trust you, but you must understand my concern, after seeing what has happened with his previous psychiatrists.”

Hannibal nodded in understanding.

“As a matter of fact, I have the book I would like to provide him with me today,” he said, pulling it from his bag, “I have read it again recently, and I think he would enjoy it.”

He handed the sleek book over the desk to Chilton, who took it with a light huff.

“The Iliad?” he asked.

Hannibal nodded, clasping his hands together in his lap.

“He doesn’t strike most as the kind to appreciate the classics,” Chilton warned.

Hannibal smiled.

“He asked for me to be tested. This is my own test. He wants me to choose a book for him, and I have. He did not ask for me to try to give him a book that he would enjoy, simply for me to give him a book. It is certainly worth a read, if he will give it a chance.”

As Chilton considered this, Hannibal mused over his own decision. He was sure Will would appreciate the book. He was far more intelligent than he let others see, and Hannibal wanted to give him something entertaining.

“Then I will consider it,” Chilton concluded, dropping the book down onto his desk with finality.

Hannibal nodded in thanks and stood to take his leave.

“Hannibal.”

Hannibal stopped, silently annoyed that Chilton had taken the liberty of using his first name.

“I really do want you to be careful with Will Graham. He has hurt a lot of people.”

Hannibal nodded sharply and walked out of the office.

Hannibal opened his computer and was met with Will Graham’s bloody smile.

He knew this was becoming a dangerous obsession, but he was curious to see how it developed as he entertained it. He was not prone to becoming obsessed, so it was interesting that something like this would gain his attention.

Will had said he was smiling to him.

Of course, he could not have been. They hadn’t even met until many months after the incident, and Will hadn’t even known Hannibal existed at that point. Hannibal had only heard of Will in passing.

But, looking at the image of his bright eyes staring into the camera, blood dripping down his chin and his teeth bared in a feral grin, Hannibal felt as if he might actually be seeing him through the screen.

Doctor Chilton’s concern for his personal safety would have been touching, if Hannibal thought it was in any way founded.

As it was, Will did not show any interest in harming Hannibal, and Hannibal was fairly confident he would be able to defend himself if Will ever took an opportunity to do so. Will was fit and quick, but still smaller in stature than Hannibal, and Hannibal was quick as well.

Hannibal traced the angles and lines of Will’s face, grinning out at him. There was much to be learned, and much to be done with Will Graham. Hannibal just needed the time to explore all of it.

Hannibal took his seat, studying the form of his patient. Will was sitting cross-legged on his bed, his posture straight as he turned a page in his book.

“I was not told you would be given the book before I had the opportunity to do it personally,” Hannibal said.

Will closed the book and set it on the bed beside him.

“The man with all the keys insists on doing all he can to endear himself to me. He wants to be my only source of anything good. I am not surprised that he took this opportunity as well.”

Hannibal nodded. He hadn’t been surprised either, but he had been disappointed.

“I *am* ,” Will said, “interested by your choice of literature. I knew this was not Doctor Chilton’s choice for material to give me. He is of the opinion that I am not interested in this type of thing. I am pleased with it, of course. I have always had an affection for the epics, though I personally like the telling of the Odyssey more than the fall of Ilium. I am grateful to have something to read.”

Hannibal smiled.

“During your time working with the FBI, you must have been seen as a type of Odysseus,” he said, “Not terribly strong or skilled in combat when compared to your colleagues, but far more clever than any of them. You are a favorite of Minerva.”

Will huffed a laugh.

“I am not a favorite of anyone, and I surely do not believe that Athena has bestowed a blessing on me. God doesn’t care to save any of us. It’s not elegant.”

Hannibal tipped his head curiously.

“You believe in a god,” he said, “I have met many who say he does not exist.”

Will looked up at the ceiling, his eyes seeing beyond it, as if he could see God himself in that moment. They were the shade of the sky, as if reflecting what only he could see.

“If there is no god, then there is an inordinate amount of coincidental happenings in the world. The beauty of destruction and creation are things that would be far from likely to happen without a divinely artistic hand. I believe he is out there, but he does not care to intervene. He just watches, and we occasionally create something artistic in his stead.”

Hannibal’s smile grew.

“Wind us up, and watch us go,” he said.

Will snapped his gaze back down and stared at Hannibal, his sharp eyes seeming to see right through him.

“You know,” Hannibal said, choosing to change the subject slightly, “the Iliad is not solely the tale of the fall of Troy. It is the tale of Achilles.”

Will nodded, a slight smile pulling at his lips as he tapped his fingers on his leg absently.

“Yes. The blessed, cursed Achilles. I can only but wonder what you might have to say about him.”

Hannibal let a moment of silence fall between them, where they shared in both observing and being observed.

“It was foretold he would either live happily, or die gloriously. I think there are many who cannot help but feel they are doomed to the same fate. They can either live safely, or take risks and perish by it.”

Will nodded.

“You do not feel restricted to those rules,” he noted, “you are here, which is a risk. You take risks, but you also live well. You are not worried about your future, despite the mystery it presents.”

“I do not worry often,” Hannibal admitted, “I feel it is a waste of time to fear for that which may or may not come, while ignoring what is happening. One can plan all they wish, but the world does not always agree with your plans.”

“Obviously,” Will said, gesturing to the walls around him, “if the world agreed with all the plans people were to make, each person would have to live in their own. Plans are often incongruent with each other, even within a single mind.”

Hannibal nodded.

“This is your copy,” Will said, lifting the book.

Hannibal nodded again, curious.

“It is not new, and I know Chilton would not own a copy, much less give it to me,” Will explained, “and he would not have gone out to find one for me. He would rather leave that to you, since *you* are my psychiatrist. Not him. Thank you for the gift. I’m sure I will be allowed to return it once I grow bored of it.”

Hannibal stood to leave, smiling lightly to Will.

“It is indeed a gift. You need not worry about returning it. I give it to you willingly, and I should hope you will not grow bored with it. I find something new every time I read it.”

Will watched him with sharp eyes as Hannibal retreated down the hall and was met by Matthew. There was a light tapping from his cell as Hannibal was led through the security door.

Learning

The death of Patrocles came into being under the tip of Hannibal's pencil, and he knew before it happened that Will Graham would be the face he saw in the fallen warrior.

There were similarities between Will and this epic figure, as well as Odysseus, that Hannibal couldn't help but admire. He was not only clever, but driven by emotion more than he would let on. His incredible empathy made him all the more powerful in his intelligence.

Hannibal just wanted to figure out how to make him use his power. He wanted to witness it, and not through a security tape.

"You wanted to talk to me about Will Graham," Jack Crawford remembered, inviting Hannibal into his office in the FBI building.

"Yes. He is my newest patient, and Doctor Chilton recommended I find out all I can about him as our therapy continues," he replied.

Jack nodded and gestured to a chair in front of his desk as he took his own seat. Hannibal nodded in thanks and sat, though he felt he did not command all of Agent Crawford's attention.

"Ask me anything," Jack said, folding his hands together on the desk in front of him.

Hannibal relaxed into his seat and set his calm gaze on Jack.

"I'd like to know what you think it is necessary for me to hear about my patient. I do not know him well enough yet to be aware of what I must ask."

Jack smirked and nodded.

"I'm sure you noticed, even from your first meeting with him, that Will has a very keen and powerful mind. He has always been brilliant, and he was a very good resource for the FBI. He didn't pass the screening process to become a field agent, so he taught forensic analysis and criminal profiling for years."

Hannibal nodded. That had all been in his files. He wanted to know more about the specifics of what Will had done while working with Jack.

"I asked him to consult on a few cases. I was advised to watch him carefully, and make sure he didn't break. I didn't watch him close enough."

"Might I ask for you to perhaps relate it with more detail? This has not given me much insight into his mind," Hannibal said.

Jack sighed and leaned back into his chair.

“Alright. I’m sorry. I’ll start again. Will and I met at the opening of the Evil Minds Museum. He and I had a disagreement about the name. He felt it gave the people who had done bad things too much grandiosity. I knew from that day that he was much more clever than most people knew. When we were faced with our eighth missing girl in the Shrike case, I asked him to help. He has a way of doing things, where he can get into the head of a killer, and figure out what they were thinking, and what they were feeling. He is the most accurate profiler I have ever met.”

That was much better. Hannibal could imagine Will standing in a classroom, trying to avoid looking Jack in the eye as he was asked to look at pictures of missing girls and become a killer to find the killer.

“Will found the killer, but the agent I sent with him to the house was killed when he tried to intervene. The killer cut the throats of his wife and daughter, and then stabbed the agent. Will had no choice but to shoot him before he was killed too. He was never the same after that. I was worried I had broken him, but he kept showing up, so I kept using him. He saved lives. He always caught the guys, and I gave him opportunities to quit. He never did. I thought he would be fine. Shake it off and keep looking.”

“That is when his encephalitis came into the equation,” Hannibal surmised.

Jack nodded.

“He didn’t tell me, and he didn’t tell doctor Bloom either. She was worried, but she respected him too much to intrude on his life. She tried to tell me to drop him, or give him time off, but I didn’t listen. I didn’t listen until he had killed two reporters, three other killers, and three of my agents who tried to bring him in. I let him get too close, I worked him too hard, and I broke Will Graham. That’s as detailed as I can get.”

Hannibal nodded.

“Thank you. This has provided valuable insight that will be helpful to me going forward with his therapy. I hope that if I cannot help him, I will be able to find something that can help psychiatrists in the future.”

Hannibal stood, and Jack stood to meet him. As they shook hands, Jack decided there was one more thing he needed to say.

“You know, Will has never liked psychiatrists, other than Alana Bloom. He’s smarter than he looks, and he knows most of the tricks, so therapy doesn’t often work on him. I wish you luck, and I hope you are careful with him.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Thank you for your help. I will do my best.”

Jack nodded.

“You want to know about Will Graham?” Alana asked, sitting down at the table with her coffee.

Hannibal nodded.

“I was interested to find out that you knew him, since you never spoke about him with me,” he replied.

Alana took a sip of her coffee and stared out the window to the grey streets.

“I just wanted everyone to leave him alone,” she explained, “he shouldn’t have been out in the field, but he hated psychiatrists, so I tried to protect him from them. Even I had too much professional curiosity to genuinely pursue a friendship with him. He didn’t want more people in his head, and I knew he didn’t need it.”

Hannibal hummed, following her gaze as she watched a woman walk a dog down the sidewalk.

“If everyone had listened to you, we would not be where we are today, concerning Will Graham.”

Alana laughed softly, bobbing her head genially.

“Yeah. If more people listened to me, there would be a lot fewer problems in every area. Will Graham is just one.”

“He has agreed to speak with me,” Hannibal said, “and I hear that is unusual in and of itself. Is there anything you think I should have in mind as I go forward?”

Alana thought for a moment.

“He has a way of getting under people’s skin,” she said at last, “he knows what you’re thinking before even you know it. It throws people off, and can bother them. He was never violent before his encephalitis. He’s not a bad guy. His blood is on *our* hands. We failed to protect him.”

Hannibal took a drink of his own coffee. The Will Graham he knew was not a vulnerable, helpless child. The people from his past seemed to think of him as such, but Hannibal was not seeing what they saw. What was it about Will that made others want to protect him so instinctively and insistently?

“Is there anyone else you think I should speak with concerning Will?” Hannibal asked.

Alana pursed her lips and thought for a moment.

“I think you should talk to Will. If he wants to talk to you, then he will. He is the only one who really knows what’s going on with him. He liked me because I didn’t try to poke around in his head. He must like you for some other reason. I hope you will be good for him.”

Hannibal nodded.

Inspirations

“You’ve been to see Jack,” Will said as Hannibal took his seat.

Hannibal nodded. He didn’t bother asking Will how he knew.

“I was told it would benefit me if I learned about your time before incarceration, so I went to the best sources I could find. This included Alana Bloom, as you would have guessed.”

Will tipped his head curiously, seemingly fascinated to find out how that would change their conversations.

“I can imagine what Alana would have told you about me, but what did Jack say?” he asked. He stood near the bars today, instead of his usual position on the bed.

“Jack told me I should be careful with you,” Hannibal replied, “He also warned me that you are smarter than you look, and that you do not like psychiatrists.”

Will smiled.

“I honestly don’t know how smart I look, but that’s probably about right. As for psychiatrists, I have nothing against them as a group. I simply don’t enjoy having people fumble around inside my skull. Who else did you consult on the matter of my mind?”

Hannibal let a moment of silence drop between them before he answered.

“Alana recommended I consult you,” he answered, “and I was not told of anyone else I should speak with. Do you think there is anyone else I should have been told about?”

Will tapped his fingers on his leg absently, almost as if he were counting something in his head.

“I think anyone else would have a much more biased opinion of me, so it might be advantageous for you to have only spoken with them. Alana is pretty good at being objective, and Jack doesn’t actually know enough about me to be very subjective.”

Hannibal smiled.

“I was surprised that both of them seem to have the same opinion of why you are here,” Hannibal said.

Will raised an eyebrow.

“And what is that?”

Hannibal studied Will for a moment.

He certainly did not seem fragile or breakable, despite being where he was. He stood like a commander with weighted options on every hand, just waiting for the enemy to make a move that would decide what his responsive action would be.

“They both believe you are easily broken, and that you simply did not withstand the force you were put under. They see you as delicate, even now.”

Will smiled, but it was unhappy and almost offended.

“Do I seem broken to you, Doctor Lecter?” he asked, his fingers brushing the bars in front of him as if he could wave his hand and make them disappear.

“If someone knew nothing of you before you entered this place, they might easily come to the conclusion that you are a psychopath,” Hannibal replied, not quite answering the question, “And they would assume you were simply never any other way. They would not consider you to be broken, but simply evil.”

Will nodded in consideration.

“A very adept analysis, and tactic for avoiding answering my question,” Will said, “I asked about what you think of me, not a hypothetical person.”

Hannibal nodded.

“The more I learn about you, the less I believe you are damaged in any way. You are not any more broken in this place than you were outside of it. You act with more authority here, where you are given none, than you ever did in your own classroom. I might even think your incarceration did you some level of good.”

Will seemed incredibly amused by this.

“We are so rarely *given* anything in this life,” Will said, “any authority or power must be taken. Perhaps my incarceration has stripped me of the social obligations to be either likable or unnoticed. I think we could all benefit from that sort of freedom at times.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Perhaps we could. Before you came here, did you make the effort to be either likable or unnoticed?”

Will set his hand on one of the horizontal bars in front of him, his muscles relaxed and his fingers curled slightly with ease.

“I was never very adept at being likable,” he replied, seeming to step back into his memories as easily as blinking, “and the nature of my way of thinking left me far too easily noticed. I made very little effort, but you can see that did me just as much good. I might not be here if I had tried harder.”

Hannibal nodded, watching the gentle curl of Will’s fingers. He moved them almost absently, so the pads of his fingers touched the bar in alternating patterns.

“I hope you are enjoying the book,” Hannibal said, dragging Will back to the present and nodding at the book that lay on the cheap mattress.

Will blinked once before turning and looking at the book as well.

“Ah. Yes. I have already read through it once since receiving it. I don’t get much to do down here, you can guess. I am starting through again. As you said, there is always something to be found upon another read.”

Hannibal waited for a breath, testing to see if Will would divulge what he had found this past read through. Will made no attempt to sate his curiosity, so Hannibal responded.

“You remind me ever more of Patrocles,” Hannibal said.

There was a fascinated glimmer in Will’s eyes when he turned back to Hannibal. He tipped his head and rocked casually on his feet.

“This should be interesting. Please, Doctor, proceed.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Patrocles was known for his empathy. He essentially *became* Achilles when he donned his armor and went forth into combat. Perhaps his reasoning can also be linked to this, as he could not bear to see the pain of others while feeling he both did and did not have the power to stop it. Your incredible empathy is likely what drove you to aid the FBI in the way you did, despite knowing it may not have done you any personal good.”

Will blinked, slowly. It reminded Hannibal of a drowsy, contented house cat.

“I believe it is my turn to ask a question,” he replied, instead of remarking on Hannibal’s comment, “What is your honest impression of Jack Crawford? There are mixed results whenever someone new meets him.”

Hannibal nodded in understanding. Jack seemed like the person that would leave many vastly different impressions upon people.

“He is a very successful man, and he does well in his work,” Hannibal began, “He seems stubborn, and like one who would work themselves to death before admitting defeat. He holds his subordinates to high standards, and can seem abrasive when his expectations are not met. He must be much more pleasant toward those whom he respects, and might treat those he does not nearly as children.”

Will grinned, walking around in his cell once more. He tipped his head back as if letting a ray of sun warm his face.

“I’m glad to hear we agree about that,” he said, “The trainees in the academy call him the guru. They only know him by reputation, and he really is successful. He drove me into the ground with work, but he was always kind and courteous to Alana.”

“Then, is he right in thinking that he broke you, in some way?” Hannibal ventured.

Will chuckled, low and amused.

“Like I said, Doctor, I’m not broken. Nor am I fragile. He freed me from the constraints that come with trying to fit in. He never expected me to fit in, and would have been sorely disappointed if I had turned out to be ordinary after all the work he did to get to me. I was more myself while working for him than I ever was teaching in the academy, and because of that, I can now be *completely* myself every day. I don’t have anything to hide behind anymore.”

Hannibal hummed.

“So, you would claim that you truly are a violent, insane, and sadistic murderer.”

Will’s eyelids fluttered, as if he were falling into the depths of his mind. His smile remained amused, though his expression grew distant.

“ *Everyone* is insane,” he retorted, “People are judged by how they interdict their own actions. If one cannot *separate* what they think and what they do, they are insane. If I *choose* to let them be the *same* , I am shunted in with those individuals. Violence is a fairly objective descriptor, I have never considered myself sadistic, but insane is subjective. I would like to know what you think on the matter.”

Hannibal wanted to grin, but he schooled his expression. This was no time to break his own rules.

“I have often found myself believing the same,” he agreed, “though I have obviously decided to continue *interdicting* my actions, as you put it. I believe everyone should become intimately acquainted with their instincts, and not fear them, though I recognize there are times when it is beneficial to postpone or reign in those reactions. Is it truly your instinct to react to me with politeness, and others with violence?”

Will huffed a quiet laugh.

“That’s two questions in a row from you, though I suppose I gave an implied one, so I will forgive it. It is sometimes advantageous, even for me, to refrain from acting on my more violent tendencies. I do enjoy having you people sent down here, so I always begin with courtesy. What I see in our first meeting is what drives my future decisions. I suppose it is my instinct to satisfy my own need for amusement, as well as gain some interaction aside from that of our dear Chilton. What instincts do *you* refuse to act on?”

The last question seemed almost an afterthought, amused and teasing. It seemed like Will already knew, and just wanted to see what Hannibal would say.

Hannibal had to pause and think for a moment. He wanted to smile and say that there were none that he refused, merely those that he postponed or redirected to best suit his needs. He wanted to show Will exactly what kind of man he was.

“There are not many,” he said instead, “as I find healthy ways to direct my instincts. I suppose I most often have to refrain from speaking too long about things that do not interest

my company."

Will raised an eyebrow, apparently impressed.

"Most would claim they have to stop themselves from hurting others. You did not. Are you simply not predisposed to violence?"

Hannibal spread his hands.

"If you asked anyone who knows me, they would tell you I am not a violent man," he offered.

Will grinned, and Hannibal thought he must understand what he meant by the words. It was uniquely thrilling to feel understood. Even stranger was it to feel almost accepted.

"Have you ever considered attempting to escape this place? With what I have seen, you would surely have been able to convince one of your past psychiatrists to help you in the effort."

Will shook his head, and the door at the end of the hall opened, signaling the end of their session.

"Anyone who helped me escape would have ended up expecting something from me in return. I never found anyone I was tempted to reciprocate gestures of good will with."

Hannibal nodded curtly and stood, letting Matthew take the chair to put back in its place. He had so much more he wanted to ask Will, but he had to wait for his next opportunity to see him. There was something about him that was absolutely addicting and fascinating to Hannibal, and he wanted to explore it as fully as he could. He wanted to open the man's skull and peer in with a magnifying glass. It had to hold something radiant.

Consultation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal was not sure what to expect, but it was not what he was met with.

Will was walking around the large room with a tether attached to him. He was bound, aside from his legs, and he was wearing the muzzle that would prevent him from biting anyone.

This was the exercise he was allowed daily, outside of his cell.

Falling into step beside him, Hannibal walked a few meters in silence. He had been told how far away to stay in order to be out of Will's range while he was on the tether. As tempting as it was to step into his reach, Hannibal had other matters to attend to, and he needed to be allowed back.

"I can only assume there is some pressing matter to be dealt with," Will said conversationally, the mask making his words echo sharply, "or else Fredrick would have made you wait until our actual appointment time."

Hannibal nodded slowly. He opened the file he was holding and looked down at the pictures again. He wet his lips anxiously, anticipating Will seeing what was there.

"There has been a killing, and the FBI contacted me with the express desire to have your opinion on it all. They seem to think it may have something to do with you, or else they would like to have their best profiler back in the saddle."

Will smirked, looking over to the pictures. His pupils blew wide, and he tipped his head curiously.

"I would stop walking, to make this all easier, but this is the only time I am allowed to walk somewhat freely. I like the opportunity to stretch my legs. What kind of killer do you suppose this is?" Will asked, as if they were discussing nothing more than the weather.

Hannibal smiled.

"Intelligent psychopath, they say. Sadist. Unpredictable. No traceable motive. Especially difficult to catch."

Will nodded to each of his points, seeming interested, but anxious to move on.

"Motives that are untraceable are still not non-existent," he pointed out, breathing deeply through the mask, "That used to be my specialty. Jack especially liked to dangle the psychopaths in front of me."

Hannibal could imagine Jack, watching Will with uncomprehending eyes. Will would seem to pull motives and actions out of thin air, and point in the direction of a killer with merely a

glance at a scene. Jack would have used him like a dowsing rod, following where he guided with little consideration to what that would mean.

“Would you tell me what you see in this killing?” Hannibal asked.

Will tisked lightly, rounding a corner where his tether pulled.

“What have I said about being given things in this life, Doctor Lecter?” He asked.

“That we rarely are,” Hannibal replied, “Are you asking what you are to gain from helping me?”

Will huffed, stretching his neck and letting it pop loudly.

“I’m not usually one to ask for favors in return for letting people into my mind, but compromises must be made when circumstances change, don’t you agree?”

Hannibal nodded.

“I will try to help you if it is something within my power to grant,” he said, “though I hope you do not ask for something that will be too difficult.”

Will smiled, nodding as he continued his leisurely pace around the room.

“I don’t intend to cause you any trouble, Doctor. I would greatly appreciate some more reading material. That is all I ask. Another book or two.”

Hannibal hummed, as though in consideration. He knew that would be easy enough, especially if Jack backed him up.

“I may be able to do that,” he agreed, holding the pictures out again so Will could look at them, “but Chilton is going to require proof that you are cooperating.”

Will rolled his eyes, but peered over at the pictures with more interest. His pupils were still wide, nearly eclipsing the color of his irises, and Hannibal stared at them as they drank in the scene.

He had wanted to see that brilliant mind in action, and was glad the FBI had been so eager to get Will on the case. It seemed they were encouraged by how he seemed to cooperate with Hannibal more than his previous psychiatrists. How he responded to being asked to help would show them whether or not he was still capable of being used by them.

“Oh, this one has motive, alright. I can see why the FBI can’t see it, though. It’s much too elegant for their *taste* . They like their cases to be simple. This one likes the finer things in life. I wonder how long they have been waiting to kill their prized animal.”

Hannibal tipped his head, feeling a pulling sensation in his chest. Aching to hear more.

“Tell me what you see?” He asked.

Will slowed down in his walking, looking at the pictures now like they were a letter from a loved one.

“This killer has had their eye on this man for some time. They have been waiting for him to be *ripe* , though. He was not properly *seasoned* before, too *bland* . I imagine the killer chose him for his manner. The killer is picky, but the FBI will not be able to find any connection between this death and his others. This is a message about the kind of person the man was. Nothing but an animal.”

Hannibal wet his lips and tore his gaze back down to the pictures as Will looked up at him.

“What should the FBI be looking for in suspects?” Hannibal asked, keeping his voice even and casual.

Will hummed softly.

“They won’t have anything to give themselves away. They will look completely normal, they may be charming. No one suspects what they are. They will seem like a perfectly functional member of society. Whimsy, I would say, is what will be their downfall. They are practical, but dreamy. Their affection for beauty and rarity is what will give them away eventually. Has Jack connected this to any other killings?”

Hannibal flipped the file shut and put his hands into his pockets as if he were just taking a walk through a park. He wondered what Will would see if he were to meet his gaze just then. Would his pupils be blown wide like Will’s? Would Will be able to see into them, and find what no one else could see? Maybe he already had.

“There have been some rumors making the rounds,” he confided, “but nothing has been confirmed. The most popular is that this is the work of the Chesapeake Ripper, though he has been dormant for over two years.”

Will nodded. He had expected as much, it seemed.

“It certainly has his theatrical flare,” Will agreed, “so I guess all they can do is wait to see if there are two more victims. This would just be the beginning of a sounder.”

Hannibal hadn’t heard of his killings referred to by that term before, but it was somewhat endearing. It may have incited a different feeling from him if it had been from someone who he did not believe understood the semantics of the word.

“You use the word sounder,” he noted aloud.

Will shrugged.

“I always did. I suppose you haven’t spent enough time around Jack to have heard it, though. He took that leaf from my book when I still worked with him. It’s all to do with the way the Ripper sees his victims. They’re livestock. It’s just the best term to use for his kills.”

Hannibal nodded, smiling to himself. Will was clever. It was almost a miracle Hannibal hadn’t been caught while Will worked with the FBI. He might have been saved by the break

he had been taking recently.

“You say this killer has an appreciation for beauty. Do you think the way they display their victims is beautiful?” Hannibal asked.

Will laughed. It was a sharp laugh this time, as if he was catching Hannibal in something.

“I’ve said before that there is a peculiar beauty in both creation and destruction. The way they kill is both. They destroy a life, but use it to create a scene of magnificence. I was always able to see death as beautiful. That’s what made me so useful to the FBI, before they let me get put in here.”

Hannibal considered this.

“Jack is not aware of that particular aspect to your abilities,” he noted.

Will shook his head.

“No. He never was. No one knew, really. Even I disillusioned myself sometimes. I was horrified at my own associations. Now I recognize them as the inspirations they have always been. I doubt I would have gotten a job with the FBI if they knew what exactly swam around in my head.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I would love to stay and talk, but there is a killer on the loose. I suppose it is now my duty to try to have them join you here.”

Will flashed him a grin.

“I’m always up for new acquaintances. Try to get them in the cell next to mine.”

Hannibal smiled and promised he would do his best.

Chapter End Notes

This scene was inspired by one a lot like this in the movie Red Dragon. Just in case anyone was wondering.

Deal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"It sounds an awful lot like Will was getting more out of you than you were out of him," Jack accused, seeming frustrated with what Hannibal was able to tell him.

Hannibal let the words rest on the air for a moment. Jack needed to know he did not control Hannibal. Not like he thought he had Will Graham. He was not all powerful.

"We have an agreement to be fair about our exchange of information," Hannibal relayed, "and considering that, I think he was rather generous with his aid to the case. This was his show of good will to us, and we must repay him before we are to gain any more from his imagination."

Jack frowned. He paced behind his desk and absently rubbed at the pale line on his ring finger. He had recently returned from a trip to Italy, and Hannibal could surmise that his wife had died. It was a shame he hadn't had the chance to know her, but it was of little concern to him now.

"That's a dangerous game to play with Will Graham, Doctor Lecter," Jack warned, "he can get into your head *without* an invitation. You're making it easier for him."

Hannibal brushed at the fabric of his trousers as if there was dust to rid them of.

"In my experience, patients are more likely to trust me if I do not force them to sneak through the window into my mind. If I open the door, or even seem to, then they are more likely to allow me the same courtesy. I *am* being cautious, Jack. Trust me."

Jack sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"Alright. So, he wants more books. Let's see if we can get Chilton to sign off on it. I assume you are going to need me to push him a bit?"

Hannibal smiled politely and offered a small nod.

"For the best result, I should be the one allowed to give them to him," he replied, "and the sooner the better. I'm sure you can understand that."

Jack nodded and picked up his phone to make a call.

This would annoy Fredrick more than anything Hannibal had done before, but it would also secure his position as Will's psychiatrist. Chilton could not refuse to let him speak to his patient if he was working for the FBI.

“Really?” Alana asked. She raised both her eyebrows and pressed her lips together like she actually expected Hannibal to be pulling some sort of prank on her.

Hannibal only nodded, keeping his gaze out the window of his office. She sat on his couch and looked up at him curiously. She sipped her beer and mulled over both the taste and what he had told her.

“I am ashamed to say I don’t really know,” she admitted, “Will was always a private person. I know he has read a lot of things. He was never out of the loop unless someone was talking about *modern* artists or something. He knew a lot of classics.”

Hannibal nodded, smiling lightly to himself. How poorly Chilton knew, thinking Will was not one for the epics.

“I suppose it was rather hopeful of me to ask. I had wondered if he would have shared that with anyone in his previous life. I suppose Jack has told you the reason I am asking.”

Alana nodded, taking another sip of her beer.

“You are helping them ask Will for his opinion on *that murder*,” she stated.

The tone of her voice let Hannibal know she was not pleased with the idea. She didn’t meet his eyes when he turned back around to look at her, and she pressed her lips into a thin line.

“You are upset with me for it,” Hannibal said.

Alana smiled sadly at him and shook her head. Her dark hair fell over her shoulder as she moved, and she tipped her head to ask him to sit with her.

Hannibal sat and waited for her to speak. She was putting her words together, and he was willing to wait.

“I don’t think it will be good for him,” she began, “and *if* I’ve been wrong about him all this time, then it won’t be good for Jack to listen to him. If he’s like *they* all say he is, then he will just lead you in circles while he laughs. If he’s how *I* think he is, then he will fall farther into his mental illness.”

Hannibal nodded. She had a point, despite the fact that she was wrong. Everyone was wrong. No one knew how Will really was.

“Perhaps you have not considered that there is a third option,” Hannibal said gently.

Alana raised an eyebrow at him. She was both wary and curious.

“Asking him to help save lives after so long being treated for his illness and having taken some, he might come back to himself as you knew him. He might remember why he worked with the FBI in the first place, and return to who he was.”

Alana smiled, and her eyes teared up a bit. She blinked quickly and looked away from Hannibal to hide her face. She bit her lips to keep her chin from quivering, and Hannibal

watched her carefully.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “you just can’t even know how much I want that. I almost can’t live with myself, knowing I didn’t see how sick he was. I feel responsible for him being where he is, and how he is. If you can help him, in any way, please do. I don’t know how I could thank you.”

Hannibal laid his hand on top of hers on her lap and leaned forward to press a kiss to her forehead. She was so naive, and conventionally lovely. In another circumstance, Hannibal would have taken solace in her presence, and watched her idly as she cared so deeply about everything. It was like watching a particularly enthusiastic puppy meeting a duck for the first time.

“There is no guarantee he will be responsive to this rather unorthodox type of therapy,” Hannibal reminded her, “But I will do my best to bring him back to you.”

Alana leaned her head on his shoulder, and Hannibal allowed her to rest there for a while.

“He likes dogs,” she confided, “and he used to go fly fishing whenever he could. He made his own lures too. He really likes the outdoors. I hope that can help you understand him better. I want to help you in any way I can.”

Hannibal smiled into her hair. She would be an invaluable asset to him going forward. She was the one who knew the past Will better than anyone else. Hannibal needed to discover that before he could fully understand the current Will.

Hannibal felt a curious sense of anticipation as he pulled out the file and opened it.

He had wheedled and needled to the point where he almost felt it was unnecessarily humiliating for someone like him, but he had done what he had set out to do. He had been allowed to have a complete inventory of items still in Will Graham’s possession when he was incarcerated.

Hannibal smiled to himself, feeling he was about to discover yet another dimension to his patient.

He had specifically wanted the list so he might get an idea of what books Will would enjoy, but there was no reason he couldn’t pour over it and learn everything he could about the man.

Fishing lures, dog food, dog brushes, fishing poles, fishing line, dog beds, pliers, magnifying glass, boat motor, and books. Finally.

Hannibal skimmed the list of books, impressed and pleased by how long it was. There were a fair few classics and mystery novels in the mix. There were fishing books and outdoor guides. After reading the list a few times, Hannibal could pick out the few books that must

have been given to Will as gifts. They didn't seem to be Will's type of book, and he could imagine them sitting, unread, on a shelf along the worn copies of Shakespeare and Ovid.

Hannibal wondered if the exact books from Will Graham's house were somewhere he might obtain them. He knew it was likely they had been gotten rid of, Will having been incarcerated for some time with no possibility of his release in the foreseeable future. Perhaps he would be able to ask Jack about Will's things. There had to be some trace of the man left on the earth aside from his reputation.

There were some things specifically that Hannibal would like to get his hands on, if possible.

Chapter End Notes

Took me a bit longer than usual to update this time, but after returning from a spur of the moment vacation, here you are. I hope you enjoyed it.

Payment

“Ah. What do we have here?” Will asked, eyeing the books Hannibal held as he approached the cell, “Jack must have helped you wheedle Chilton about this. I am grateful to you.”

Will stepped back from the bars as was protocol, Matthew overseeing the handover. Hannibal slipped one of the books through the drawer, none but Matthew flinching at the loud sound it made as it closed.

Will nodded, and Hannibal took his usual seat facing the cell.

“I am still unsure about what type of book you would prefer to have in this place,” Hannibal said, “though I think you will enjoy these.”

Will picked up the book and looked it over carefully as Matthew walked back down the hall to his station.

“I would *kill* for a good crime novel,” he said, flashing a smile to Hannibal that had plenty of teeth, “Oh, but that’s the *problem,* isn’t it?”

Hannibal smiled. If prison had done Will any mental damage, it had done nothing but improve the man’s sense of humor as far as Hannibal was concerned.

“I am afraid that would be detrimental to my therapeutic endeavors,” Hannibal agreed, though the smile was still present, “but I hope you can enjoy these.”

Will nodded in thanks, taking a few steps to place the book on top of the Iliad on the mattress. He returned and faced the bars, his hands clasped behind his back like a perfect gentleman.

“I presume I will be given the other once I have given you some more information on the killer you are looking for,” he said smoothly.

Hannibal nodded.

“I would have preferred a different approach, but Jack and Fredrick agreed against me on this count. They believe you have been holding back.”

Will smiled.

“I shall do my best to not leave them wanting,” he promised, though his tone promised fangs.

“Thank you. Is there anything you noticed in the killing that you have not said?” Hannibal asked.

Will hummed, rocking on his feet casually.

“They are exotic, for sure. I’m sure Jack’s profile includes the term Caucasian, but he should reconsider. I cannot promise they are not, but they are certainly not an average white american. As I have said, they are a lover of art, and fine things. They will probably not kill anyone who is in terrible health, as that would mar the elegance of their creation. It would be tasteless. They are very attentive to detail, which will make it harder to catch them.”

Hannibal nodded as Will spoke, encouraging him to continue.

“If the FBI ever lets the media think they have a clear pattern, it will change. They are a clever killer, above all, and will not be caught by anything so small as that. If Jack ever tries to anger them, it will only backfire. This killer will not slip up in their anger. They will only become more brutal, and will cut closer to home.”

Hannibal nodded, not wanting to interrupt Will, but Will stopped and frowned at him.

“Stop pretending to be impressed,” Will snapped suddenly.

Hannibal tilted his head curiously, looking Will over. He seemed frustrated, and he now crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“Why should I not be impressed?” Hannibal asked.

“Because you already know all of this,” Will stated.

Hannibal was taken aback. Was Will trying to reveal him to the FBI now? It would not be a very opportune time for him to try.

“I am not sure what you mean by that,” Hannibal said, keeping his tone calm and raising an eyebrow.

Will scoffed.

“You’re smarter than that, Doctor Lecter,” he chided, “you figured all of that out before you came to see me. You should be asking me questions about what you *don’t* already know, instead of letting me go on telling you everything you *do*.”

Hannibal inwardly sighed. It seemed the game was not up yet. They still had a few rounds at least.

“Very well. You said whimsy will be their downfall. Would you care to elaborate?” Hannibal conceded.

Will nodded curtly and bounced on his feet a bit.

“They fancy themselves an artist, and what artist is not a bit prone to whimsy?” he began, “They find beauty in the odd, or unorthodox. Perhaps they have a bit of morbid curiosity. Of course, they will use the nature of art to hide the morbid aspect of their fascination.”

Hannibal was enjoying this, possibly a bit too much.

“What is the nature of art that they will use?” he asked.

Will smiled.

“Much of the best art is morbid in its own way. We have depictions of martyrdoms, cannibalism, rape, and murder of every kind. It’s been sensationalized since before the Roman Empire. Anyone with a morbid taste can find something to sate their appetite in the classics.”

Hannibal nodded. Will, as always, had a point. He was very bright, and had likely spent much time thinking about such things, especially while left to his own devices here.

“So you believe this killer will have an affinity for older art pieces,” Hannibal prodded.

Will shrugged.

“If you look hard enough, you can find morbid art from any time. Even now. Students of art have a very good excuse to have access to or copies of incredibly morbid and gruesome content. Depending on their tastes, even sexual pieces are readily available to them. It’s only a matter of wanting.”

Hannibal tipped his head.

“Do you believe this killer’s motive is sexual in any manner?”

Will grimaced.

“No. That would be far too crude. Blasphemous, almost. No. The victims are nothing more than livestock. They feel no attraction of any kind to the cows or pigs. It would be tasteless. No. Their motive is refined, and elegant. They delight in the suffering of those below them, those who are less. Their grief and pain is beautiful, in the same way taxidermy is beautiful. It comes from the destruction of something, but creates that which can be enjoyed.”

Hannibal hummed.

“Does the killer torture his victims, then? If their suffering is what they endeavor to preserve?”

Will thought about that for a moment, his head tilted and his gaze distant. His tongue clicked absently as if he were chiding a child.

“Perhaps, but not as punishment, and not excessively. May I see the file?”

Hannibal nodded and checked again to make sure he had not left any paper clips or staples in the file before he slid it through. Will took the file with a polite nod of thanks to Hannibal as he flipped it open and began to read.

“The cause of death is mutilation. There are no marks showing they were restrained, and no defensive wounds. The victims were probably sedated. That means there was little suffering

during the process. The mutilation was not torture. That means the mutilation was only for the aesthetic. To create art."

Hannibal listened. Will was very clever. It was a wonder he had ever been caught himself, though his illness was likely to blame for that.

"So the suffering of their victims is not what motivates the killer," he concluded, making Will furrow his brow at the file.

"No," he agreed, "they don't kill in order to make them suffer. They enjoy being witness to suffering, but they do not cause it. Perhaps they are truly motivated by others causing suffering. They might target those that cause others to suffer without reason. Maybe in little ways. Nothing that would be very easy to link between victims."

Hannibal nodded.

"Some small mannerism the killer finds needlessly cruel, though it is socially acceptable," he said.

Will nodded, pressing his lips together and sliding the file back through the drawer.

"I'm afraid I can't be of much help more than what I've already done. I'm only being given one scene to look at, when you of all people know this is not their only kill. I need to have access to more information. I only put the clues together. I don't create them from thin air."

Hannibal was a bit disappointed with that. He knew Will had more to say, but perhaps Will didn't want to give Jack too much information without the same in return. Hannibal walked to the bars and retrieved the file. He signaled for Matthew to come back and watch as he gave Will the book.

Will held Hannibal's gaze as the book was slid towards him, and he lifted his chin. It looked like he was trying to put armor on in the face of an adversary, defying their power. Hannibal wondered who the armor was for. He hoped it was not himself.

"Thank you for the books. I would be happy to continue helping you if I can be given more information to build off. You should already have a very detailed profile, relatively speaking. Give Jack my best, and tell Alana I hope the dogs are well. She should know I don't expect her to keep them all. I can't imagine I will ever see them again, and she has my permission to sell them or give them away."

Hannibal nodded as he gathered his things and was escorted back down the hall. He heard the shuffle of Will taking the book from the drawer, and a soft hum of approval as he was sure Will added the book to his slowly growing stack.

Information

“I don’t see why we shouldn’t just give him the whole library!” Jack all but bellowed, “Hell. Let’s just let him out so he can come back to work! What the hell were you thinking, Hannibal?”

Hannibal closed his eyes and had to stop himself from inserting Jack into a recipe.

“He did provide us with some very beneficial information and insight into the mind of this killer,” he pointed out calmly, “and you do not ask me to create a working profile with so little material. If you wish to have Will’s help with the case, you must be willing to give him substantial resources.”

Hannibal’s calm demeanor seemed to calm Jack down too, slowly. Jack took a few breaths before he spoke again.

“I apologize, Doctor Lecter. When I worked with Will, he just needed to see a scene, fresh or not. I never had a problem getting him to tell me what he thought. I know he knows more. He is using us.”

Hannibal nodded.

“He may be,” Hannibal conceded, “though only as a source of amusement. I don’t see any reason we should refuse him that. It surely can do nothing but benefit his mental state. I believe it may be helping him come back to himself. I ask you to accommodate us both.”

Jack breathed through his nose deeply and closed his eyes. He pressed his lips together and swallowed.

“Alright. I’ll get him what he needs, but I want you to keep your pet patient on a short leash. He’ll take whatever you give him and go a mile.”

Hannibal smiled, once again fascinated with the perception others had of Will. They all thought of him as fragile, yet sharp. Like a shattered bit of china. It was a fine line to walk, but Jack and Alana managed it with agility. Hannibal was anxious to meet anyone else he could find that knew Will from before his incarceration.

“I may be able to tighten the leash if I am allowed to view the scenes and evidence myself. I will be his source of information more than you are, and he will want to please me so he can continue to receive details. I will also be able to word my explanations in ways that will best help him to understand what it is we need, and what we have to work with.”

Jack pinched the bridge of his nose, clearly frustrated with the entire situation.

“Alright,” he said at last, “here’s what we are going to do. I want him on a smaller case first. Once we catch the killer, he has *earned* more information for the suspected Ripper kill. I

want to make sure he's not sending us on a wild goose chase with us none the wiser. I'll let you in so you can get familiar with everything, and we'll do it your way, but on my terms."

Hannibal nodded.

"I ask nothing more, and would expect nothing less," he answered.

"So, you're the new shrink for Will Graham?"

Hannibal tilted his head at the agent who had walked up. She seemed confident and comfortable. Hannibal could tell she was smart, despite her rather crass wording.

"That is certainly the new consensus," he agreed, "I am currently working on his mental care. I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter."

The agent accepted his offered handshake, and smirked.

"Yeah. I know. I'm Beverly Katz. I was surprised to hear he talks to you. He never liked psychiatrists."

Hannibal nodded.

"So I have been told. Were you very familiar with him before his arrest?"

Beverly huffed a laugh and crossed her arms.

"Oh, he wasn't close to anyone. We talked, but he was always weird. It was hard to tell if something was off with him or not. I always thought that was clever of him. You trying to collect intel for his therapy?"

Hannibal decidedly liked Beverly. She was blunt, but smart. If she knew anything that could help him, she would be useful as well.

"I was not informed you should be included when I did," he answered, "I was told he was not friendly with any members of the team here. I would be grateful if you are ever able to offer any insight to me."

Beverly nodded.

"I'd love to help, doc. Will Graham may have been weird, but he did his job. Even when he knew it wasn't good for him. I actually think I owe him a favor anyway. Just ask if you need anything."

Hannibal smiled and nodded. She was very accommodating. If the rest of the team was similarly so, he would have a very good time working with them and learning how they operated.

"Thank you."

Jack walked in with two other agents, and Beverly immediately straightened her posture, though she hadn't been slouching before. Jack nodded to them both and waved the agents to their stations.

"These are agents Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller," Jack said, gesturing to them as they got to their respective tables, "and you have already met Beverly Katz. Good. This is the team, and who you will be working with."

Hannibal nodded to each of the members in turn as they were introduced, gaining a friendly wink from Beverly when Jack waved at her. The other two agents only looked at him with mild curiosity and disinterested wariness.

Ah, well. Perhaps Hannibal would only be able to get along well with Agent Katz. He could make do with that.

"If you'll look over here," Zeller said, as if Hannibal was nothing more than a tourist in their lab, "I'll show you the body we have. It's really something to look at. I hope you're not squeamish.

Hannibal offered him a smile, walking over to the table he had gestured to.

"I was an emergency room surgeon in another time," he said, "so I am fairly confident in my ability."

Zeller looked him over appraisingly, as if reevaluating his worth as a human being. He then flipped the sheet back and uncovered a body with no small amount of theatrical flare.

The body certainly hadn't earned that much of an introduction. Hannibal had seen plenty, and been the cause of a fair few, bodies that had better presentation.

"This is miss Lillian Harper," Zeller said, "cause of death-"

"Overdose of heroin," Hannibal stated, leaning over the body.

The entire team stared silently at him, waiting for something to happen. Something to explain what had just happened.

Hannibal looked back up and at each of them. He smirked slightly. They were easy to impress.

"A slight vinegary scent," he explained, "very faint, especially this long after death, so I realize you would not have noticed it. Heroin often is accompanied by the smell, though it is sometimes considered odorless."

Zeller was no longer impressed, though Price was thoroughly entertained. Beverly was amused, and Jack was as impatient as ever.

"Yeah, well, these cuts here were made postmortem," Zeller continued, "and she was found in the middle of a school cafeteria. We know she wasn't killed there. There was dirt and gravel on the backs of her feet, like she had been dragged."

Zeller made a less than dramatic hand gesture to illustrate his point, and Hannibal just nodded.

“We found a fingerprint on her arm,” Price piped up, pointing to his own arm near the elbow, “Probably from a thumb.”

Hannibal nodded in thanks to him and looked at the arm that had been indicated. There was no evidence that she had been a regular drug user, and Hannibal didn’t see any symptoms physically that would dispute that. She appeared to be healthy, aside from being dead.

“Was there very much heroin in her system?” Hannibal asked.

Zeller turned and picked up a folder, leafing through it before handing it, opened, to Hannibal.

“Not as much as we usually see with overdose cases, but obviously enough,” Zeller said, folding his arms and shaking his head at the body.

“Exactly enough,” Hannibal corrected, “She was not a user of heroin. This is just over the amount that would be safe for her to use without dying. Whoever killed her knew both of these things.”

Zeller frowned.

“I thought you were supposed to be giving Graham the evidence, and getting his opinion,” he complained, “It seems like you are trying to do his job for him.”

Hannibal stepped back and raised his hands in surrender.

“My apologies. I had hoped to help you catch the killer. I will do my utmost to keep my thoughts to myself when they are not welcome. I am sure Will will say the same, so you may take *his* word for it.”

Zeller grew a little pink in the cheeks, and the death glare from Jack only made him cough nervously and look away.

“That’s not what I meant, Doctor,” he tried to salvage, “I just wasn’t aware you were also going to consult on the case with him.”

Hannibal smiled.

“I’m afraid we are very much a package deal for the time being. Anything that goes to him should come through me, and vice versa. It is not ideal, to be sure, but it is what we have.”

Zeller nodded energetically, as if trying to make everything up with just his agreement. Hannibal was content to let everyone believe amends had been made. Agent Zeller was a necessary part of the team, and if he ever had the inclination to share information about Will, Hannibal wanted to take advantage.

“Regardless,” Hannibal said, “I will be sure to give Will as much information as I can, and bring you anything he can come up with.”

Hannibal looked to Jack, who nodded and waved to the team. Each agent gathered a file from their station, which Jack compiled into one and handed to Hannibal.

“Good luck with Graham, Doctor. Good luck.”

Hannibal nodded and thanked Jack before taking his leave and heading back to his car. He hummed softly to himself, feeling entirely pleased with how things were turning out.

He had every reason to see and talk to Will, and there was nothing Chilton could do to interfere. He might as well save his next scene until he knew Will would be allowed to see it. He felt no motivation to create unless Will would be able to appreciate it, now. Will was his new muse, and inspiration. He created for, and with Will in mind.

It was odd for Hannibal to feel this need, this desire, to impress and reel in. He would often entertain himself with the game, pulling people closer to himself, or giving the line slack so they drifted away. He very rarely ever genuinely wanted to continue pulling.

He would have to be sure not to pull too fast, or the line might break.

Will would appreciate the metaphor. He enjoyed fishing.

Communication

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Well, this is quite the development, don't you agree, Doctor Lecter?" Will asked.

Hannibal had just explained the change in plan, detailing the agreement of exchanging help on the smaller case with information on the Ripper case. Will was pacing around his room, bending and unbending his right arm as if gauging a sensation in the limb.

Hannibal nodded.

"Has something happened to your arm, Will? It seems to be bothering you today," Hannibal noted, curious despite himself.

Will shrugged, smiling slightly. Even his small smiles held a dangerous glint to them.

"Our friend, Doctor Chilton, thought it would be apt to do a bit of experimenting on his patients," he explained, "and of course, being his favorite, I was first on his list of subjects. I'm afraid he didn't quite get the results he had been hoping for, though."

Hannibal felt a slow trickle of rage seep into his bloodstream, but he held his composure. Frederick Chilton had given something to Will. He had done tests on Hannibal's patient. Without Hannibal's knowledge, or consent.

"Don't worry about it too much, Doctor," Will said calmly, "It doesn't bother me terribly. I rather think he hadn't expected you to come in today, though. He might have waited so you wouldn't notice."

Hannibal smiled, though he was mentally deciding what the best way to display Chilton would be.

"I think you are likely correct in that line of thinking," he agreed, "regardless, will you agree to Agent Crawford's proposal?"

Will smiled, and this time it wasn't nearly as bitter.

"If I were to say no, where would I find my entertainment?" he asked, "Of course I will. I hope I can be as helpful as Jack wants. I wouldn't want to disappoint him."

Hannibal stood and slid a file through the drawer to Will's side. Will bowed slightly in thanks before he stepped forward to retrieve it. He leaned against the cell wall and flipped through the papers leisurely, stopping every now and then to read something.

"I don't know much about medicine, Doctor, but I think the killer gave this woman exactly enough heroin to kill her. She wasn't a casual user, in fact, I don't think she had ever touched the stuff. It would only take a slightly too large first dose. Whoever killed her, knew she

wouldn't have a tolerance, and knew how to measure it well enough that it would only be just enough to do the job. No large overdose here. Just the right amount. What do you think of that, Doctor?"

Hannibal nodded. Just as he had thought. It was good to see Will was that aware.

"I will relay that to the team."

Will looked at Hannibal curiously at that, tipping his head as if trying to figure something out.

"You already thought of that," he stated, "did you tell them?"

Hannibal waited a breath to answer.

"I am not the one the FBI has asked to consult on the case," he said simply.

Will grinned, wide and amused.

"Oh. You did tell them. Someone didn't think you should be giving your opinion. I would say most likely Zeller, but Price surprises me sometimes. Tell me?"

Hannibal smiled.

"I don't think that is relevant to the case, Will. What other insight do you have?"

Will shook his head and tapped the folder lightly.

"Quid pro quo, Doctor. Which one was it?"

Hannibal wanted to laugh. Will was too clever for his own good. It would be marvelous to see him out in the world, among regular humans who would have no idea what kind of creature walked amongst them.

"Agent Zeller," Hannibal confirmed, "though he very quickly apologized for the out of line comment. He hadn't meant to offend."

Will nodded, feigning a somber expression.

"Oh, of course he didn't. It would be foolish of him to offend the psychiatrist of a psychopathic serial killer," Will said, then flipped the file open once more and smiled at the contents, "Now, for this killer. The body was moved, so the killer likely has a place he has *consecrated* for the purpose of killing. It will be *special* . Significant to him. He is likely either a student of medicine or science. I don't think he is quite experienced enough to have a degree in either, but he may. His consecrated ground will have a lab, of sorts, where he can work with the drugs he uses. I imagine he will have a few drugs, not just heroin, that he will use in his killings. The gravel will be from outside there. He carried her into the building with more care than out of his lab."

Hannibal listened. He knew he would be able to get the recordings of their conversation from Chilton later, so he had never needed to take notes. It was somewhat of a relief. He liked having the opportunity to just watch as Will worked.

Will's voice took on another tone when he talked about other killers. It was like he was narrating their actions as they happened, describing it to someone who couldn't see.

"They lured her into their home, their safe place, their chapel. He convinced her to let him inject her. *Nothing dangerous, I'm trained* , he says. *I know what I'm doing* . She lets him. She feels he can be trusted. Once the drug enters her system, he waits, and watches. He recognizes all the signs and symptoms as her body slowly succumbs and then gives up. Once everything has stopped, he feels he can get to work on the next part of the plan. The conclusion to his paper. His defense of his thesis."

Will seemed to snap out of a daze, looking back up to Hannibal.

"I think he is definitely a student," he continued, sounding more like himself, "but he introduces himself to his victims as if he is a professional in his field. He has a warped concept of the human body, and he is trying to show it to us through these kills. He's making his argument. This is a persuasive essay for his perspective. He probably talks to his victims for a long time before finally luring them to his lab. They trust him before he kills them. They trust him enough to let him give them an injection of something. He is very good at what he does, and each kill will only make him better."

Hannibal nodded. The way Will had managed to slip so perfectly into the mindset of the killer had been breathtaking. Hannibal wanted to see it again. He wanted Will to do that for him.

Why hadn't Will done that for him?

"Is there anything else that might help us identify a suspect?" Hannibal asked, standing up.

Will held the file out through the bars, defying protocol. Hannibal thought he must be testing the water, to see what he could get away with at this point.

"He is very smart," Will said, "likely seen as gifted. He's probably younger than you all expect. He stands out, though. He doesn't get along with his peers as well as most. He probably has some childhood issues or trauma. Bullying problems, or extremely religious upbringing. Something that could warp his perception of others, just a degree. One degree can equal miles when navigating."

Hannibal took the file from Will. Will made sure their fingertips brushed, just for a moment. It was a bold test of his boundaries. How much would Chilton let him get away with before he was punished? How much would Hannibal allow?

Will held Hannibal's gaze as he released his hold on the file. Hannibal remembered Will saying that eyes could be distracting. That he only made eye contact in order to tell the other party something. Hannibal wondered what Will was trying to tell him today. He could see firm resolve and determination, along with amusement, intrigue, and anger, all swirling in

Will's eyes. He didn't know what was meant for him, though. He couldn't' see what Will was saying to him.

"Doctor, will I be getting any more books, or am I to be entertained only by the Iliad, Ovid, and Le Chateau de ma Mere?" Will asked, gesturing to his small pile of books.

Hannibal considered it for a moment.

"I would hope the case can provide some material for you to dwell on. However, I shall do my best to obtain something more for you, if you can behave yourself in my absence."

Will grinned, showing his teeth.

"I'll do my best, Doctor, but you know how it is. I can get so bored down here. Maybe see if you can get me an interesting cell neighbor. I'd love to have some casual conversation aside from our little talks."

Will ended that with a wink, and Hannibal chuckled.

"As I said, I will do my best. For now, goodbye. I hope to speak with you again soon."

Will nodded, giving a mock salute.

"As do I, Doctor Lecter. Good day."

Hannibal nodded and made his way back down the hall where Matthew let him through the security doors.

He had a few words he would like to exchange with Doctor Chilton.

Chapter End Notes

Charlemagne, my previous computer, died suddenly from unknown causes. An autopsy revealed very little, and the delay almost resulted in this chapter being late.

Fortunately, Carmilla has come along and saved the day. She is a much nicer laptop, and she will be helping me keep on schedule from here on out.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter.

Lies

“Well, he is *technically* my patient,” Chilton drawled, seeming far too unconcerned by the topic of conversation, “He is in my hospital. I have been taking care of him for so long. I can treat him in whatever way I see fit. I do thank you for your help with him, though. You are truly an asset.”

Hannibal smiled, but he was internally smothering Chilton’s kidneys in a nice cherry wine sauce.

“He is technically nothing of the sort,” Hannibal replied, “he is legally *my* patient, and nothing to you but a prisoner. I have been grateful to you for your cooperation with the FBI and myself thus far, but if you choose to overstep your bounds like this again, I will do whatever I can to have Will removed from your care. Do I make myself clear, Frederick?”

Chilton stood up abruptly from behind his desk.

“You have no right to do that! Will Graham is my patient. I was doing you a *favor* by letting you have a crack at him. He is my patient!”

Chilton was overly agitated now, almost yelling at Hannibal, who only stood against the onslaught.

“Frederick. I can, and I have every right to. Will Graham’s mental health is now no one’s concern but mine. I am the only one who can say what is best for him, and if you continue on this route, I will advocate that what is best for him is to be removed from your care. I am sure the FBI will aid me in my attempts, as Will Graham has been invaluable to them these past months. You wouldn’t want to have them as your enemy, Frederick.”

They were both aware of the very real threats Hannibal was laying out, and Chilton didn’t quite seem to know the best course of action to deal with them. He was torn between his pride and his desire for notoriety. If he stopped his work on Will, he would remain who he was. If he let Will be taken from him, he would be known as nothing more than the man who had a psychopath confiscated for *his* bad behavior.

“You don’t want me as yours, Doctor Lecter,” Chilton said, trying and failing to sound intimidating, “so I would suggest you stop with the threats. I’m going to have a chat with Jack Crawford. Then, we’ll see what happens concerning Will Graham.”

Hannibal sighed, but nodded.

“Very well,” he said, “then I will be taking my leave. I hope you do not do anything you will regret.”

In reality, Hannibal knew Jack would just knock some sense into Chilton. There was no danger in letting him talk to Jack. Hannibal had the trust of the FBI, and when Jack would

ask for his perspective of events, Jack would support his position. Chilton would find no allies with them.

Chilton waved him away, sitting back down at his desk and trying to seem busy.

Hannibal left, still feeling irked at the idea that Frederick Chilton, of all people, had dared touch Will. Will Graham was Hannibal's, and no one else's. He would make that clear to everyone, if he had to brand his name into Will's skin to do it.

"Did you threaten Doctor Chilton?" Jack asked, his anger relatively subdued in comparison to normal.

Hannibal tilted his head and looked at Jack with a neutral expression.

"Not in so many words," he replied calmly, "but my intentions were implied. I made it clear I will do what is best for Will's mental health, and for the FBI."

Jack nodded, and his anger dissipated.

"Good work," he said.

Hannibal smiled.

"I mean, I was pretty sure he was experimenting on Will behind our backs, but I couldn't do anything about it, really. I've been wanting to catch him at it and knock some sense into him for a while now. Thanks for giving me the chance."

Hannibal nodded.

"It was a pleasure," he said, "and I am anxious to hear what Will's insight has managed to offer the investigation."

Jack smiled and stood from his desk, waving for Hannibal to stand and follow him.

"I would have guessed you would bring us back to him," Jack said, "come down to the labs and the team can explain where we are at the moment. Will was as astute as ever."

Hannibal nodded and followed Jack to the labs. Beverly and Price seemed to be having a heated discussion over something on a tablet they were both hunched over. Zeller was watching them with his arms folded, and an amused eyebrow raised. They all looked up and the tablet disappeared when Jack walked in. Beverly smiled at Hannibal and waved as she walked over to her station.

"Alright," Jack said, once again all business, "Give me the basics, and make sure Doctor Lecter feels welcome this time."

The last comment was given with a stern look pointed at Zeller, who looked indignant.

“The gravel isn’t from anywhere near the school she was found in,” he said, confirming what Will had predicted, “and rumor is the victim never took drugs.”

Price piped in, taking over that train of thought.

“Actually, rumor is she never took *any* drugs. She was basically superstitious of all medications. She even refused to fill a prescription for Fluoxetine for her anxiety. She didn’t want to put anything into her body. I would say this was bordering on paranoia, if drugs weren’t the thing that ultimately killed her.”

Hannibal considered that. It confirmed what he and Will had thought about the woman’s tolerance for heroin, but it posed an obstacle for the killer to convince the victim to have an injection. The killer had the task cut out for them, and it was not a simple one by any degree.

How does one convince someone with an irrational aversion to medications to receive a lethal injection of an illegal drug?

Well, Hannibal knew how *he* would do it, but the profile of the killer didn’t support a background of psychology, especially one advanced enough to warrant that line of thinking. Will had been adamant that the killer had earned the trust of the victim, and had convinced her to willingly take the drug. Hannibal just had to prove that he was right.

“We also found traces of rubbing alcohol on her arm under where the fingerprint was,” Zeller said, bringing the conversation back to himself, “the kind doctors use to clean skin before giving you a shot.”

Hannibal nodded. That made sense, seeing as the killer likely convinced her it was an injection of little consequence.

“She was last seen talking to a Carson Meyers,” Beverly spoke up, “who she had been seen with quite a bit recently. We’re looking into it to see if he fits our profile.”

Hannibal tilted his head, thinking.

It wouldn’t be how he expected this killer to act, if he was seen with his victims often enough to be pinned down as a person of interest so quickly. If he were that careless about being seen, he may feel he had some sort of defense closer to home. Something that would redirect suspicion away from him once he was investigated.

“Then the profile Will and I have created will finally be put to use,” Hannibal noted aloud, “I do hope it is helpful in catching the killer. I believe we have done all we can unless, or until, there is another death.”

Jack nodded.

“Thank you, Doctor Lecter. I’m sure you and Will have been more helpful than anyone knows yet. If everything goes according to plan, there shouldn’t be another body before we catch this bastard. We’ve got a suspect now, so it’s only a matter of time.”

Hannibal nodded, but he wasn't really paying attention to what Jack was saying anymore. There was something about this killer that wasn't quite fitting together correctly with what they knew. He wouldn't be easily identified, if their profile was correct.

They must not have the right suspect. At least not yet.

Hannibal had nothing against giving the beginner some more time to work on their design, so he needn't say anything to the team just yet. Let them track down Carson, and let them find out for themselves that they were wrong.

It wouldn't have any adverse effects on their relationship with Will, and it would give Hannibal more opportunity to see Will work.

Safety

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So, they have a suspect," Will said, walking around in his room. He seemed restless today, but Hannibal couldn't figure out why.

"Yes. Lillian was seen with a young man frequently, and recently. He is the best lead the FBI has at the moment."

Will huffed a breath, stopped walking, and looked over to Hannibal. His gaze was sharp, and his eyebrows twitched down for just a moment. He was thinking. He was developing an idea, and Hannibal wanted to know what it was.

"I don't think that will be their man," Will said at last, "but he may very well be a clue that the killer left behind for us. I wonder what they mean to say by it."

Hannibal knew for sure Carson was not the killer, now. He was no longer just relying on his own intuition. He had Will's remarkable mind to confirm his suspicions.

"Today I am not here to talk about the case, Will," Hannibal reminded him, "This is to be one of our usual sessions. We have not had one in some time. Until I have more information to give you on the case, why don't we focus on you?"

Will raised an eyebrow, but nodded.

"I assume that means I don't get any more books until then," Will said.

He didn't sound upset by the notion. It was merely an observation. He sat down on his bed next to his small stack of books and laid his hand on top of them, almost affectionately.

"I would not wish to have that be the case," Hannibal offered, honestly wanting to have the chance to give Will more reading material, "but I imagine it very well may be."

Will nodded curtly, his eyes fixed on the center of the floor of his cell. His gaze was distant, as if he wasn't truly there in full. His mind was wandering elsewhere.

"Might I ask where you are now, Will?" Hannibal asked, honestly curious. It wasn't often Will wasn't present during their conversations, and he wanted to know where Will went.

Will hummed, smirking slightly in an amused way.

"Walking through a field near my house at night," Will replied casually, as if it were the most obvious thing, "I like to leave the lights on and look back at my house through the dark. It brings a feeling of calm and safety."

Will's voice had taken on that tone, again. The same one he had used when narrating the thoughts and actions of the killer. His eyelids had slipped down, almost closing, and his head was tilted slightly back in a relaxed way that exposed his throat. It almost seemed as if he were dreaming.

Will blinked, his eyes refocusing and he turned to Hannibal.

"Tell me, Doctor Lecter, is there something that gives you that feeling? The feeling of being safe and calm, when you have the evils of the world swirling around you during most of the day."

Hannibal considered his answer. He rarely felt the need to find something to give him protection.

"I suppose the nearest thing is when I am cooking," Hannibal admitted, "There is a level of control I have over my own kitchen that I do not have when I am not at home."

Will's eyes glittered like he had just found the heart of Hannibal, and Hannibal wondered if he actually had. With Will's remarkable mind, the small insight Hannibal had offered may very well have provided mountains of information to him. It would be fascinating to know more.

"Does it distress you to know that you are likely never to see your house and home again? If the law has its way, you will never walk through that field at night, and look back at the house through the dark, before you die," Hannibal said, wanting the exchange of information to be more equal between them.

Will's eyes turned a dark, stormy blue and he frowned.

"I am not happy about it if that's what you mean," he replied, his tone perfectly measured and even, "but I don't need it anymore."

Will closed his eyes and turned so he was facing directly in front of himself again.

"I have everything I need right here. I live most of my days in my head, now. Things here just aren't interesting enough for me to stick around. That's why I like it when psychiatrists come around. It gives me something in reality that's entertaining. Would you be distressed to be put in here, away from your kitchen, and your nice suits, and your expensive wines, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal considered it. He knew it was an unhealthy mechanism that Will had just described. There was a level of disparity between reality and the expanse of one's mind that must be kept or there would be psychological consequences.

Despite knowing that, Hannibal knew what his honest answer was.

"I would experience distress initially," he replied, "though I believe I would quickly resort to the same tactic you have. I would spend much time in my mind palace. I would wander the vast halls and shut the doors against the harsh reality."

Will tipped his head, as if he were trying to picture Hannibal doing just that. His eyelashes fluttered against his cheeks as his pupils darted back and forth like he was dreaming.

“Then we are just alike,” Will said with a smile, his eyes still closed, “We have more in common than most would see when looking at us. I wonder how far that extends.”

Hannibal smiled at that.

“We are identically different,” he answered.

Will opened his eyes and looked at Hannibal with clear amusement. He seemed both entertained and intrigued by the fact that Hannibal was matching him in topic.

“Are you able to find safety in the memories you have of your home?” Hannibal asked, wanting to keep Will’s attention on what he needed.

Will hummed.

“I rarely feel *unsafe* anymore, though perhaps I have simply lost my sense of care for my own well being. I don’t have much control over what is done to me, so any harm that may come is beyond me,” Will answered, “I believe that is called *learned helplessness* in the psychological field, Doctor. I hadn’t expected to ever experience it myself. Perhaps the most honest answer would be that I rarely think about safety, or consider it. Any safety I once felt seems to have been false, so any safety I may feel in the present or future has the potential to be false as well. I only have acceptance, now. I accept that I am never safe.”

That was indeed fascinating. Will was very intelligent, and informed in the field of psychology. His file had described how he had refused therapy before his incarceration due to “knowing all the tricks” and it not working on him. That all made more sense now, as Will would have no difficulty seeing through the clumsy attempts of therapists to dig into his mind and rearrange the furniture.

It was still unfortunate that he had come to the point where he had learned helplessness, though Hannibal thought that might be an exaggeration. He didn’t seem to feel helpless, but he may be feigning his confidence in order to preserve himself.

“Well, Doctor Lecter, have I given you the insight you were hoping for?” Will asked, leaning slightly forward as if to show he was listening.

“You have been very accommodating,” Hannibal said by way of response, “I hope you have gained the insight you were hoping for from *my* responses.”

Will shrugged. He stood and walked to the bars, standing straight as if he expected Hannibal to look him over like a piece of meat.

“I didn’t have anything specific in mind when I asked, though I know *you* did. All psychiatrists know what they want to hear when they ask. I wonder what you wanted to hear.”

Hannibal kept his gaze trained on Will’s eyes, raising an eyebrow.

“If I told you that, you might develop an idea for what you think the proper response is to my questions in the future,” he answered, “so I think it would benefit me more if you remained unaware of what I expected.”

Will smirked, as if he had expected that. Hannibal wasn’t sure he could surprise Will with anything. He wanted to.

“Fair enough. I think I could guess what you wanted me to say, if I *really* tried,” Will replied, his tone smooth as if he were offering some forbidden fruit. He leaned slightly towards the bars with his shoulders, and tilting his head down so he was looking up at Hannibal through his eyelashes.

Hannibal felt his heart stutter in his chest, and he wasn’t sure how Will expected him to respond. He kept his facial expression carefully neutral, but he hesitated in his answer.

“I am sure you could. You have a remarkable ability to understand the thoughts and intentions of others. I do not doubt your ability to understand even my own,” Hannibal said. He had to speak slowly to keep himself from sounding as affected by Will’s actions and words as he was.

Will stuck his lower lip out in a pout, as if that wasn’t the response he had been hoping for. He leaned his arms against the bars and shifted his weight so it was unevenly distributed on his hips. The sight was far too enticing for Hannibal. He wanted to step up to the bars and pull Will against them. He wanted to feel Will’s flesh with his hands and taste it with his tongue.

This was new to Hannibal. He had been intrigued, and interested, even obsessed, with Will before. He hadn’t considered his obsession to have extended into this territory.

If Hannibal didn’t know any better, he would have thought Will was *manipulating* him.

That couldn’t be it, because *Hannibal* manipulated everyone around him. He wasn’t susceptible to manipulation in the same way.

Will sighed and walked back over to his bed. He sat down on it and leaned back against the wall.

“You would be a lot more fun if you played along, Doctor Lecter,” Will said, closing his eyes, “I don’t play games often, but when I do I like to have someone on the other side of the chessboard.”

Hannibal smiled softly.

“Perhaps I am simply not telegraphing my moves far enough beforehand. I am playing the same game as you, Will. I am just better at it than most of your opponents.”

Will opened his eyes and looked at Hannibal. His eyes glinted a dark blue, and he grinned.

“I’m glad to hear it, Doctor. May the best man win.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope everyone was safe during the festivities of the fourth, aside from racists, misogynists, nationalists, etc.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. <3

Risks

Chapter Summary

Interviewing the suspect

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Doctor Lecter,” Beverly called.

Hannibal turned to meet her as she trotted up to him.

“I’ve been trying to catch you for a couple of days, but you always seem to disappear before I manage to talk to you,” She continued.

“My apologies,” Hannibal replied, “I have been very busy recently. Lucky for you Jack has asked me to come by his office today so he can go over what was found on the suspect. What might I help you with?”

Beverly nodded, fidgeting just a bit. She seemed uncharacteristically nervous about whatever it was. She pulled out the tablet he had seen she and Price hunched over previously.

“Jimmy and I saw this on Tattlecrime,” she said, pulling up an article.

The picture at the top was of Hannibal himself. He was standing outside the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. From the angle of the picture, Hannibal knew exactly where the photographer must have been standing in order to take the picture.

“Freddie Lounds,” Beverly said solemnly, “she seems to think there’s something going on between you and Will that isn’t exactly ethical. She claims you have a deal that can help him get out if he talks to you.”

Hannibal hummed thoughtfully. It was almost amusing that Freddie would think so. The only spoken agreement they had was simply to be honest with each other and trade answers to questions. There was nothing to suggest Will would ever leave the prison while he was alive.

“How unfortunate for her,” Hannibal said, “it is unpleasant to be so incorrect when one’s profession is to provide information to others. Truth often comes back to take the very ground out from under oneself, in a manner of speaking.”

Beverly seemed relieved by his reaction to the news. Perhaps she had thought he might become angry.

“Yeah. Someday all this will come back and bite her,” Beverly agreed, “but I just thought you should know before someone says anything weird to you. Like a patient or something. I can imagine that would be awkward.”

Hannibal nodded.

“Indeed. Thank you very much for your concern. I shall keep it in mind.”

Beverly nodded and headed off back to the labs as Hannibal made his way to Jack’s office. Hopefully Freddie Lounds would not cause him any trouble in the future. It would be unfortunate for him to have to deal with her.

“Doctor Lecter, right on time,” Jack said, gesturing for Hannibal to sit.

Hannibal nodded and took a seat across from him. Jack rearranged some papers before he looked up at Hannibal and smiled.

“I really think this is probably our guy,” Jack said, “Carson Meyers showed up out of the blue and started talking up Lillian. A month and a half later, she’s dead and he’s the last one who saw her alive. It’s looking pretty good. I want you to observe the interview, though. Make sure the profile still fits.”

Hannibal nodded.

It certainly did look as if Carson was the man they were looking for, but he knew better. Will had said he may be a clue the killer left for them. Hannibal was trying to figure out what that might mean.

“Does the other information you found match what Will and I expect?” Hannibal asked.

Jack moved some papers around and read off a few of them.

“For the most part. We’ll know more after the interview. He should be here in just a few minutes, if you’ll come with me.”

Hannibal nodded and followed Jack to another office room.

“How did you come to know Lillian Harper?”

“I’m studying psychology, and one of my friends introduced me to her so I could consult her for my term paper.”

Carson very certainly was not the killer. Hannibal still needed to figure out how he fit into the puzzle, though.

“What was your term paper on?” Jack asked.

Carson smiled, and Hannibal could tell he was passionate about the topic. His bright green eyes shone with excitement, and his fingers tapped to release some of his energy.

“I was researching the correlation between individuals who are highly hypnotizable and the effect of placebos on them,” he replied, “Lillian had written one of her papers on hypnosis, and had gotten it published because her professor was so impressed. I knew she would be a good person to talk to.”

Jack wasn’t pleased. His story was too good and easy to believe. It would be easy enough to verify, and there wasn’t any reason to believe he was lying. It wasn’t turning out to be as easy as Jack had thought it would be.

“Where were you the night she was killed?” Jack asked.

Carson chewed on his lip a bit as he thought back.

“Well, I was with her around six, talking about my paper. At about seven thirty, I had to go to a study group to work on a Latin assignment. I was there until ten, and then I went back to my apartment to sleep. I slept in until nine, because I didn’t have class the next day until two. I can give you the information for the other people in my study group, and my roommate, if you want. They can all tell you I was where I say.”

That would make Jack even less happy. He wanted this to be their man, and if he had a solid alibi like that, it would be almost impossible for it to be proven. Jack would have to look for someone else, and he didn’t have anyone else in mind just yet.

“Yes. I would like you to give me any information for them that you have,” Jack said, handing Carson a notepad to write on, “Just so we can verify everything you said.”

Carson nodded and began writing. He seemed very agreeable and intent in his task of remembering everything he could to help. He was a very pleasant young man.

Hannibal stepped forward, knowing Jack wouldn’t mind at this juncture.

“I am a psychiatrist, myself,” He said, extending one of his business cards, “and I would be very interested in reading what you come up with. Please, contact me if you need any more consultations for your paper.”

Carson’s expression brightened even more and he took the card eagerly.

“I think I’ve read some of your stuff,” he said after reading the name, “you’re brilliant. I’d love to have your input.”

Hannibal smiled and nodded. Jack was still unhappy, but he just sighed.

“Do you know of anyone who would have a reason to harm Lillian?” he asked.

Carson slipped the card into the pocket of his shirt and shook his head.

“She was smart and well liked,” he answered, “I don’t know why anyone would hurt her. I mean, I suppose there’s always that sort of rivalry thing some people get into. She was really smart, so maybe someone thought she was competition. That’s the only thing I can think of.”

Jack nodded. He wrapped up the interview, and Hannibal could see that he was far from satisfied with the results as he showed the young man out.

“Well, we’re back square one,” he sighed, falling into his chair and huffing unhappily.

“Not quite,” Hannibal replied, “Will believes this young man is a key to understanding something about the killer. As I come to know him better and learn more about his work, I am hoping to find out what Will means by that.”

Jack raised his eyebrows. He was impressed.

“Alright. You think it might have something to do with his research?”

Hannibal was beginning to think so, but he wasn’t going to say something he was unsure of.

“I believe he may know the killer, or know something about the killer,” he answered, “and by spending time with him, I may be able to learn who or what he knows.”

Jack nodded. He was pleased with that, at least.

“Good. That was a smart move, Doctor Lecter. I just hope Will isn’t leading you down the wrong path for his own amusement.”

Hannibal nodded, smiling lightly.

“I believe he gains more amusement from leading me to the correct path, but forcing me to find my way from there,” he replied, “but I shall keep my guard up regardless.”

Chapter End Notes

Am I being too obvious? I don't know if everyone can just tell what's going on here or if I just know too much. Maybe let me know what you think I'm doing so I can know if I'm being stupid or not. <3

Changes

Chapter Summary

A little short, but necessarily so. I had to set some stuff up for the future.

Hannibal had read over the paper that Lillian Harper had written. The one that had been published afterwards. It really was very good, especially for someone who was still in college. If Hannibal had been her mentor he would have also gone forward to have it be published. It was very well done.

Carson Meyers was extremely enthusiastic about his work, and Hannibal appreciated that.

What he did not appreciate as much was the intense questioning he was subject to as one of his psychiatric resources for his paper. The fact that Carson seemed to be a fan of his work made it almost unbearable.

“Doctor Lecter, are you aware of anyone who is a highly suggestible individual?” Carson asked.

Hannibal sighed.

“Might I inquire as to why you would want to ask me such?” Hannibal answered.

Carson nodded, still writing away in his notebook as if he wasn’t also having a conversation.

“I just wanted to help my friend out with an experiment, and the results could really help me with my paper. Lillian was going to help me with that, but obviously that’s not going to happen now. I figured you would know some people, being a psychiatrist.”

If Hannibal weren’t so dignified, he would have rolled his eyes at the young student.

“I’m afraid answering your question would be compromising my agreement of doctor patient confidentiality. I can go as far as saying I do indeed know of people who are, but I cannot tell you anything more.”

Carson pouted his lip, though it wasn’t intended for Hannibal. He was just disappointed as he continued to write. He didn’t seem to be able to focus very well, and so he would always be multitasking. Hannibal would consider it rude if the young man couldn’t prove that he had actually heard what was being said to him. As it was, Hannibal recognized a medicated attention deficit well enough. It wasn’t Carson’s fault he had to act in such a way.

“I should have guessed,” Carson said, “I mean, you really are a very professional guy. I know there are some therapists who would be happy to talk to me about their patients, though. I

don’t encourage that, of course. I just might take advantage.”

Hannibal smiled lightly. The boy was clever, he would give him that.

“As long as you do not divulge their identities to me, I will deny everything,” Hannibal assured the boy, “though I may be able to help you if you have questions on the condition. I know the material well enough.”

Carson grinned, glancing up to Hannibal for a moment.

“I figured. You have a way about you. Don’t give unsolicited information, am I right? Yeah. I have a few questions for it, but I’ll ask you later. Right now I need to go talk to Matthis. I’ll see you later?”

Hannibal nodded in agreement. Carson did his best to be polite at all times. His scatterbrained nature made it difficult, but Hannibal recognized the effort.

“Please inform me of what you need, and I shall do my best to help you,” he said.

Carson nodded and waved goodbye as he walked away. Hannibal began to wander around the school campus a bit, curious to see what sort of environment the killer may be in daily. He would be able to explain his presence away easily enough if anyone asked. Not that they would. Most would just assume he was a professor because of his suit and demeanor.

Hannibal’s phone rang.

“Doctor Hannibal Lecter,” he said.

“Are you joking?” Chilton asked without preamble, “You want me to put Abel Gideon next to Will Graham? Can you imagine the chaos?”

Hannibal sighed internally. He had been expecting such a call, but had not been relishing in the thought.

“I am incredibly serious, Fredrick. I told Will I would try to find him an interesting neighbor, and Abel is the most interesting patient you have other than Will. Any others would be merely an annoyance, and Will would not be as amiable toward any of us if he were put in that situation. If you have further questions about it, you are welcome to ask Agent Crawford. I am sure he would be happy to hear any of your concerns.”

There was a moment of silence on the other end, and Hannibal knew Chilton was thinking back to the last time he had tried to complain to Jack. Hannibal didn’t know the specifics, but from how Chilton had acted towards him in the aftermath, he knew it could have only been unpleasant for the doctor.

“Hannibal. I don’t know what game you are playing with Will Graham, but I hope you know it can’t end well for you. No one has ever gotten out of a game with Will Graham without a few scrapes at best,” Chilton warned.

Hannibal thought that was terribly considerate, but ultimately useless advice. There was nothing to gain if he didn't take some risks, and the potential reward was growing more enticing with every day that passed.

"Thank you for your concern, Fredrick. I do promise I am being cautious. I would very much appreciate it if you would refrain from questioning my judgement when it comes to my patient, however. Please let me know when the change has been made. I am looking forward to the next time I visit the hospital."

Chilton huffed unhappily on the other end. Hannibal knew he felt like his concerns were going unaddressed. He wasn't completely wrong in that respect, but he was also giving far too much unsolicited advice.

"You mean next time you visit Will Graham," he snapped, apparently dancing on a knife edge for the fun of it, "I know you are more interested in him than in helping the FBI."

Hannibal smiled to himself. If those things had been mutually exclusive, Chilton would be correct. As it was, Hannibal only gained from his flirtations with the FBI. He was allowed to see Will more often and witness the dark recesses of his mind more thoroughly because of their desire to know what Will could see.

"If you are saying that I am more invested in the well-being of my patient than the success of the investigations, you are correct. My first responsibility is always to my patient. The FBI comes second in priority," Hannibal said, "But if you are insinuating I have something other than either of those in mind, then I would warn you to be careful making accusations without evidence."

The other end was silent, and Hannibal took a breath, smiling at the scent of the fresh cut grass nearby.

"Goodbye, Fredrick," he said, ending the phone call.

Normally, he would have considered it rude of himself to not allow Chilton a chance to reply, but he had just tried very hard to insult Hannibal, so it was of little consequence. Fredrick would recognize the gesture and hopefully think before speaking next time.

Hannibal caught sight of Carson talking to another boy from across the walkway. Carson didn't notice Hannibal's presence, as he was intently scribbling in his notebook as always and seeming to ask the other boy questions.

The boy stood with perfect posture, seeming alert of his surroundings while also relaxed. It reminded Hannibal much of himself in a way. His sharp eyes scanned the school grounds, and Hannibal was sure not to be seen watching him. If Hannibal had ever relied on nothing but a hunch, he would have guessed this was the killer they were looking for.

It must be Matthis. Carson had said that was who he was going to be speaking with. Hannibal thought it was interesting that he was so close. Carson seemed blind to the monster he associated with. He chatted pleasantly, barely sparing a glance for his companion.

Hannibal began wondering what type of experiment Matthis was overseeing. There were a few options, and Hannibal was intrigued.

Mistakes

“Any news on the case?” Will asked. He was laying on his bed, staring at the ceiling much in the way he had been the first time they had met.

Hannibal slid the most recent draft of Carson’s paper through the drawer along with Lillian’s paper. Will didn’t react to the sound of the drawer sliding back to his side of the bars. He just tapped his fingers lazily on his chest and breathed evenly.

“We are looking into other associates of miss Harper, looking for anyone who is studying medicine or one of the sciences,” Hannibal answered, “Though it may take some time, as she was well known among the student body, particularly in those areas.”

Will hummed and closed his eyes as if he were going to sleep. There was less sound echoing in the hall today, and Hannibal knew it was because the cell nearest Will’s now held a prisoner who was less irritating than the others. Chilton had gotten around to doing his job after all.

“Is your new cell neighbor to your satisfaction, Will?” Hannibal asked, sparing the man a pointed glance.

Abel was watching Hannibal as if he were an animal caught in a bear trap. His eyes glittered with malicious intent, and vulgar curiosity. Hannibal decided he did not like him very much.

Will finally sat up, swinging his legs over the side of the bed with a sigh.

“He’s certainly more interesting than Barry was,” Will conceded, “I’m grateful to you for managing to wheedle Chilton for me. I’m rarely bored nowadays.”

Hannibal smiled and nodded.

“It was my pleasure,” he replied.

Will smirked and walked over to the drawer, retrieving the articles and scanning over the top page. His eyes shone with interest, and he seemed to be either reading extremely quickly, or seeing something in the passage that no one else could by just looking. His eyes jumped across the pages as he flipped through, and Hannibal could tell he wasn’t reading them. At least not in any way others did. His eyes didn’t scan left to right, top to bottom the way they should have. They seemed to follow their own pattern.

Hannibal was silent as Will read, waiting to hear his thoughts.

“Well,” Will said, blinking and flipping the top page back over after a few minutes, “I think I have a good idea of how the killer gains the trust of his victims.”

That was surprising to Hannibal. He had read both of those papers, and he hadn’t found anything that pertained to the killings. There wasn’t anything related to drugs or death, and he

knew Carson was not the killer. He didn't know what Will saw.

Will looked up at Hannibal and smiled. It looked as if he knew Hannibal was a step behind him now.

"Would you explain?" Hannibal asked, not wanting to admit that he was in the dark.

Will huffed a laugh and shook his head as if reprimanding a child.

"My question first," he said, "The boy, what is he like?"

Will lifted Carson's work up and tapped the handwritten name there, raising an eyebrow. Carson had scrawled Matthis' name near a space he had left blank to be filled later with information from the experiment.

"He is very concentrated on his work," Hannibal replied, wondering how Will had managed to identify Matthis as the killer without ever having seen him, "he is observant and alert. He reminds me somewhat of myself in an earlier time."

Will listened, staring at the floor of the hall and nodding softly.

"I thought as much," he said, "From his work, I can tell he is very clever."

Hannibal was growing impatient. He wanted to know how Will knew how Matthis was gaining the trust of his victims. He hadn't decided yet if he was going to point the FBI in the direction of him yet, but he would need evidence at least reasonable suspicion in order to do so. He had nothing yet. He wasn't used to not having the upper hand.

"Truly he is," Hannibal agreed, "I admire his work immensely. I do not think I was as accomplished as he in my schooling years. He may very well surpass many of us in his career."

Will frowned, and set his jaw. He huffed unhappily and flipped through a few more pages, pointedly avoiding looking up at Hannibal.

Hannibal hadn't expected that reaction, and it was curious.

"Well, there you have it," Will snapped, looking up and staring at Hannibal with vibrant green eyes, "You have everything you need in order to catch the killer."

Will shoved the papers back into the drawer and it slammed to Hannibal's side of the bars. Hannibal frowned, tilting his head. Will turned and lay back down on his bed, but his hands were unnaturally still at his sides. He didn't seem relaxed anymore.

Hannibal stood and retrieved the papers from the drawer. He watched Will through the action, and Will didn't react to the sounds of his movement.

"Will, have I done something to upset you?" Hannibal asked, genuinely curious and more concerned than he would admit to anyone.

Will scoffed.

“Do I have to have a reason to be upset? I’m crazy, aren’t I? You should just go and continue mentoring this nice young student. I’m sure you’ll be doing more good there than in here. He’s a lot like you, anyway.”

Was Will upset because of Hannibal’s comment about Matthis? That would be odd. He hadn’t ever reacted to Hannibal talking about someone else, though it wasn’t a frequent occurrence. Will didn’t have any reason to be upset about anything, so Hannibal was left baffled by his behavior.

“I had hoped to have a longer session with you today, Will,” Hannibal said, knowing their time was still short of halfway gone.

Will closed his eyes.

“Seems to me like you have a killer to catch, so you shouldn’t be wasting your time. Go back to your real job and catch this guy and come back when the Ripper kills someone else.” he said with such finality that Hannibal supposed there was nothing more to be done.

Hannibal walked back down the hall in silence and pondered over the odd conversation they had just had. Their previous sessions had all been pleasant enough, and Hannibal had no reason to believe anything had changed.

“Pardon?”

“I’m telling you, Chilton is convinced he has the Chesapeake Ripper in his hospital at this moment,” Jack answered, sounding almost as angry as Hannibal felt, “I need you to get over there right now and help me figure out if he’s right. I’m already on my way.”

Hannibal could hear the sounds of traffic from the other end, confirming that Jack was in his car at the moment. He didn’t know how anyone could be foolish enough to think the Ripper was being incarcerated already. He also didn’t know how anyone could have done a convincing enough job to make people believe they were in fact the Ripper when they are not.

Hannibal made his way to the hospital, being careful not to allow his anger to show through driving recklessly or through any changes to his demeanor as he walked up the familiar stone steps. He hadn’t expected to be back for a few more days, when he would have another session with Will and try to mend whatever damage he had unknowingly done.

Once Hannibal saw the scene, he almost laughed aloud at how ridiculous it was that anyone would mistake it for his own work.

He had created a scene much like this before, though his had been more meaningful. He would personally never have recreated this particular scene after the initial death. It had been an act of curious interest more than anything, and he was done with it.

It was rather clever of whoever to have nearly perfectly recreated one of his confirmed tableaus, though. It would certainly raise the suspicion of his involvement, if nothing else.

As Hannibal looked closer, and the longer he spent studying the scene, the more convinced he was that Will had been the force behind it. No one would believe Will was the Ripper, based on his personal history and everything else, but Hannibal wondered if Will had convinced someone else to create this on his behalf.

But then there was the question.

Why?

“Abel Gideon,” Chilton was drawling, “has been a model inmate and patient until now. Obviously, he was just lulling us into a false sense of security. The reason no one has been able to catch the Ripper is because I already had him.”

Hannibal knew Will had done this, now. Indirectly. He had convinced Abel Gideon to kill the nurse in this manner. Hannibal still wondered why.

“May I speak with Abel?” Hannibal asked.

Chilton frowned.

“He’s not your patient, Doctor Lecter,” he replied warily, “are you trying to collect all the most notorious killers?”

Hannibal wanted to snarl and grimace, but he kept his expression carefully neutral. The mere thought of having Abel as his patient was enough to make him want to vomit. The man had no tact or elegance. He had loathed the fact that he would have to see the man nearly weekly after he moved next to Will.

“I have no intention of speaking to him after today,” Hannibal assured Chilton, “but Jack has asked that I confirm or deny that he is indeed who you claim he is. I must speak with him ro be sure.”

Chilton still seemed wary, but he let Hannibal talk to him.

Abel was in his cell, next to Will’s and it was odd to walk past Will instead of stop to speak with him.

“Doctor Lecter,” Abel said, seeming pleased in some crass way, “I never thought you would spare me so much as a glance, having Will Graham at your disposal.”

Hannibal didn’t want to talk to him. He wanted to snap the man’s neck and then have a conversation with Will. Perhaps even steal Will away from this place and finally find out everything Hannibal had been wondering about him but couldn’t learn in this setting. That would be the ideal outcome. It was unfortunate he was here to talk to Abel.

“Did you kill that nurse to get my attention?” Hannibal asked, knowing full well what the answer was, and what Abel would say.

“No. I killed her because I wanted to,” Abel said with a shrug.

“Do you believe you are the Chesapeake Ripper?” Hannibal asked then, wanting to get this over with.

“You know,” Abel said, apparently content to keep the conversation going as long as possible, “I never really liked that name. It’s not really representative of what I do, is it?”

Hannibal wanted to laugh. The man was so presumptive. He actually was acting as if he deserved the title the press had given to Hannibal.

“What is it you do?” Hannibal asked.

That was where Abel got stuck. Apparently, his image of the Ripper was not as evolved as it needed to be in order to keep the delusion together under scrutiny.

“It doesn’t matter much, now does it?” Abel said after a moment of thought, “What I do has created such a stir in the community. I’m the new boogie man.”

Hannibal was uninterested in anything Gideon had to say, but he needed him to prove he wasn’t who he claimed to be.

“It matters quite a bit,” Hannibal replied, “I am not convinced you are the Ripper. I have been developing a profile for the killer, and you have not shown me it fits you at this time. Now, if you would please endeavor to answer my questions with some level of sincerity I would be appreciative.”

Gideon scowled.

“Doctor Chilton is convinced,” he said.

Hannibal nodded.

“Doctor Chilton has not been asked to consult on the case,” Hannibal retorted, feeling his reserves of patience draining more quickly than usual.

There was a low chuckle from Will’s cell, and Hannibal felt like he was being *mocked*.

“Abel,” Will called, “play nice now.”

Gideon pouted dramatically.

Hannibal wasn’t sure if he should be grateful to Will for his intervention, but he *was* fascinated. He didn’t know what kind of influence Will really had over Abel, and now was the time to find out.

“So, tell me, Doctor Gideon. What is it you do?” Hannibal asked again, thinking that was the best way to go about it.

Abel sighed and shrugged.

“I just kill people,” he said, “Everything's a bit of a blur, doctor. I’m not quite sure of anything anymore.”

Hannibal smiled to himself. That was good enough for him.

“Thank you Doctor Gideon. I think that is quite enough.”

Hannibal walked over and stood in front of Will’s cell. Will was laying on his bed the same way he had been when Hannibal had seen him last.

“Do you have a question for me now, Doctor Lecter?” Will asked without moving or looking over.

Hannibal tilted his head. Will was playing a new game. He hadn’t expected Will to change the game so suddenly.

“Have you convinced Abel Gideon that he is the Chesapeake Ripper?” he asked.

Will smiled.

“I’ve helped him come to a point where his sense of self was fuzzy at best. It was simple enough to suggest that he might be. Obviously it hasn’t stuck completely yet. I didn’t exactly take my time with him. His new identity was a decision on impulse on my part. Did you enjoy the show?”

Will seemed terribly amused and content.

“You told me to come back once the Ripper killed again,” Hannibal noted, “was this your version of an invitation?”

Will laughed, clear and happy. It wasn’t bitter or mocking.

“Honestly, I wasn’t sure they would bring you in for it. I was hoping, of course, but no. I didn’t intend for this to be the kill that brought you back. I was merely entertaining myself.”

Hannibal nodded.

Loyalty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“This is on your head, Hannibal.”

Hannibal frowned, wanting to tear Chilton’s tongue from his throat. He just couldn’t get it into his head to call Hannibal by his earned title.

“While I did ask for Abel Gideon to be moved, there was no reason for me to expect or believe that Will would do anything of this nature. I rather expect you are more to blame for allowing a patient to be alone with a single nurse of small stature. I do believe you are in no place to be pointing fingers, Fredrick.”

Chilton turned red, and Jack sighed.

“It doesn’t matter. It’s not anyone’s fault,” Jack said, “We know Gideon isn’t the Ripper now, and we need to keep working.”

Chilton folded his arms and tried to give off the appearance of nonchalance.

“Unless this is some ploy by them both to divert your attention,” he said, “It’s obvious Will Graham is clever enough for that.”

Hannibal nodded, though he was having a hard time not strangling the man. Jack spoke, saving him from having to simplify his thoughts enough to have Fredrick understand him.

“Until we have some real evidence one way or the other, I want Doctor Lecter to keep helping us on the current case.”

Chilton huffed.

“If Will Graham causes the death of anyone else, I’m pretty sure we can say his psychiatrist is not doing his job properly,” Chilton said, “since he didn’t while under my exclusive care.”

That was laughable. Will had caused havoc at every opportunity before Hannibal had begun his work with him. After Will had started therapy with Hannibal, he had been much less troublesome until now. It would not be Hannibal’s fault. It would be completely up to Will.

Jack stood up, apparently having had enough.

“Thank you, doctor Chilton. We really should be on our way now. Doctor Lecter will see you at Will’s next appointment.”

Chilton was not happy, but there wasn’t anything he could do about it. Hannibal stood to join Jack and nodded at Chilton respectfully. He was very pleased to be leaving.

Matthis walked out of the building, his head on a swivel to see if he was being watched. Despite his alert state, he was unaware of Hannibal. Hannibal watched him and waited until he got into his borrowed car and drove away.

Hannibal waited a few moments before he walked into the building through the door the boy had used.

It was easy to find the scene the boy had left. Hannibal could smell the blood over the sterile scents of the school building after the custodians had finished their rounds.

The man was laid out on a table with his face carefully dissected, just as Lillian's had been. There were long, careful cuts down his arms as well, the skin peeled away to expose the muscles and veins.

It truly was an admirable piece of work.

Hannibal had been doing his research, and had found that Matthis was indeed a medical student. He was taking a strange combination of classes, including chemistry and theology. That was how he had come into contact with Carson. He took so many different classes that one or two managed to overlap with the other boy's.

Hannibal hadn't been able to find out exactly what type of experiment the boy was doing. It seemed Carson was the only one who had been told about it.

Matthis had very few friends, having an antisocial personality. The only person who seemed to be able to get him to care about anything was Carson. The boy's enthusiasm seemed to spur some sort of instinct in Matthis, likely sparing Carson's life. Carson could convince Matthis to go out with other students, and to answer his questions about whatever he might want.

Hannibal pulled a few things from a small pouch. He began carefully placing the evidence around on the body in a way that would not rouse suspicion. A few hairs he had taken from Matthis' apartment, a fiber from the carpet in his car, and a thread from a shirt he wore frequently.

Hannibal knew he couldn't make it too obvious, or it would be questionable whether or not Matthis himself had left the evidence behind. He had to give them enough to convict, but not enough to question.

Hannibal would have liked to observe Matthis a bit longer, but he knew he needed to make his next Ripper kill soon. He refused to do it if Will was still on this case, or not trusted. He had to wrap this up quickly so he could get back to Will.

"So, after the first body, the killer got sloppy?" Jack asked, sounding genuinely confused, "It typically takes a bit longer."

Hannibal only looked back over the body.

“There is no evidence to indicate Lillian was the first victim of this killer,” Hannibal reminded him, “and there is certainly something different about this killer than most. We cannot fully predict him.”

Jack was predictably unhappy about it.

“So, he’s been killing people, but just decided Lillian and this man were the only ones who deserved to be found?” he asked.

Hannibal nodded, thinking to himself.

“As Will said, this killer has a warped image of the human body. It is possible he has finally perfected his design. He had no reason to display the failures. Lillian and this man are his magnum opus, in a sense. This is what he sees.”

Jack sighed, shaking his head. He couldn’t understand.

“At least we have something to go off. I just wish we had some suspects to compare the evidence to,” he said.

Hannibal nodded.

“I think Carson’s friend, Matthis, should be considered. It is possible he is using Carson to find his victims. This man was a psychologist who would often work with students. I believe we will find that Carson has spoken to him about his paper,” Hannibal revealed, “It would be a clever way to lead us in the wrong direction. We look at Carson first, after all.”

Jack nodded.

“Alright. Let’s do a background check on the kid and get him in here to be questioned. Doctor Lecter, I’ll want you to stand in on it again if that’s alright.”

Hannibal agreed.

When they looked into Matthis, they would likely find that he fit the profile, and then they would be able to compare the evidence to him and he would be caught. It was a shame to see a young mind being taken out of the public so early. As it was, Hannibal had no other option. Will had made himself clear, even if Hannibal didn’t know his reasoning.

The young student sat perfectly still in the interview room. He had not made any complaint about being asked to be interviewed, and he had complied with every request Jack and the team had put to him. It was an admirable thing, but would ultimately provide them with the proof they needed to arrest him. Hannibal had made sure of that.

It really was a shame, Hannibal thought, that he had to be arrested in order for Will to continue talking to Hannibal. He wished Will hadn’t asked it of him, if only for his own

entertainment. It would have been interesting to watch the fledgling killer find his wings.

Matthis had asked if he would be allowed to work on a paper while he was waiting, ever studious. The request had been politely denied. He sat, seeming unbothered by everything, with his dark brown eyes half-lidded and his mind far away. It was almost unnatural how still he was able to sit for that amount of time. Hannibal wondered what he was thinking of.

Jack finally came into the room, holding a file and not meeting the boy's curious gaze for a moment. When he finally looked up, he met Matthis' eyes with a light, comfortable smile.

"Thank you for agreeing to talk with me," Jack said, more agreeable when he needed to get information from a suspect than he was with his coworkers, "I hope it isn't very inconvenient to you."

Matthis didn't offer a smile in return, and he didn't seem to see any need to.

"Not much," he replied flatly, "Though I would have liked to write my paper since it took so long for us to start. I don't much like procrastinating."

Jack kept his smile, and nodded to the young man.

"I understand. You are a very good student, I hear. Studying medicine, chemistry, and theology. Is there anything you aren't interested in?"

The question was posed in a friendly, joking manner, and didn't raise any suspicion in the boy.

"I'm not very good at art," he replied, his tone still bland, "it's not easy to understand like anatomy is."

Hannibal almost smiled. The boy was very intelligent, albeit not emotionally. Not many people would compare art to anatomy in terms of understanding. Far fewer would claim anatomy was the easier of the two.

Jack nodded and flipped open his file.

"I also hear you are close friends with Carson Meyers," he said, "so I'm sure he let you know when Lillian Harper was found dead."

Matthis nodded, unaffected by the information.

"I'd really say Carson is my only friend," he replied, "I'm not very sociable. He's sociable enough for both of us. And yeah, he told me about Lillian. He has been trying to find a new expert on hypnosis."

Jack seemed interested by the way Matthis didn't seem bothered by the death, but reacted more pragmatically.

"Do you know anything about hypnosis?" Jack asked.

Matthis shook his head before he brushed his fringe of hair out of his face.

“I’m not studying psychology,” he said, “I’m more interested in the physical part of people.”

Jack was sure to smile at that.

“Then what is your experiment about that Carson Meyers is waiting for?”

Matthis hesitated, but it was difficult to tell if he was startled by the question, or merely gathering his thoughts.

“The physical effects of placebos on a patient,” he answered, “Doctor’s don’t often use placebos, but it can be necessary if the patient suffers from hypochondriasis. I want to strengthen the information we have on the benefits and dangers of doing so.”

Hannibal knew what Will had seen. He knew how Matthis was convincing his victims to have the injection.

Matthis would convince them it was the placebo in his experiment somehow. They would believe all effects from the injection would be from their own minds, and not from the substance. He had chosen people who would understand the experiment, and who would be happy to help him with it. He may have even asked Carson to introduce him to people who were highly suggestible.

“I see,” Jack said, “and so your information on the effects of placebos would be beneficial to Carson in his research, as long as he knew if the subject was highly hypnotizable.”

Matthis nodded curtly.

“Exactly. I’m keeping my subject pool diverse in every aspect I can, which includes suggestibility. Carson is actually helping me in that regard. I suppose you could call it a symbiotic friendship.”

The last comment was paired with the smallest twitch of his lip as his eyes grew distant again.

Hannibal could tell Matthis really did enjoy the company of Carson, despite his social deficiency. He only had one friend, but they were truly friends. It wasn’t just a cover or him trying to appear normal. Carson was not only his protection from suspicion.

The questions continued, but Hannibal had found out everything he had wanted to know. He still wasn’t sure how Will had known it.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is up early because I am going camping and will miss the day it was supposed to be up. If you comment on it while I am still isolated in the woods, I won't be able to reply right away. I'll get to the comments once I return to society.

Next chapter will be up on the 30th as long as I don't run into a killer in the woods while I camp. OR maybe even then.
<3

Favors

“I am fairly certain Matthis Hayd is the killer,” Hannibal stated, sliding some papers into Will’s drawer as the other man continued to lay on his bed, unmoving, “We must only await the results of the fingerprint and DNA tests to verify.”

Will smirked and stood up. Hannibal noticed the books were absent from their usual place on the mattress, and he did not see them anywhere else in the cell either.

“Glad to hear it. He fits the profile I put together?”

Will walked over and stood by the drawer without taking the contents. He just stared down Hannibal, who smiled and gestured to the file.

“See for yourself,” he bid.

Will raised an eyebrow and pulled the papers and pictures from the drawer. Hannibal watched closely when Will set his gaze on the picture of Matthis they had provided. Will’s expression went blank and emotionless. Hannibal either couldn’t read him, or he really did not feel anything about the young man.

There was another picture included that Hannibal was curious to see Will’s reaction to. Once the authorities had begun looking into the boy, they had found a large storage unit registered to him. They had obtained a warrant to search it, and Hannibal was sorry for having helped catch him if only for what was found inside.

Will’s eyes flashed, such a dark shade of blue they almost seemed black, when he saw it.

Matthis had claimed he didn’t understand art. What he truly meant by it was that depictions of humans always seemed wrong to him. He was not ignorant to the nuances and details of art. He simply preferred them to be applied in a slightly different way.

The unit had been papered from wall to wall with diagrams and pages of writing. The center was obviously prepared for the careful preparation and dissection of his victims. It was a sterile environment, and would appear clinical to those he had convinced to participate in his experiment.

The sketches depicted human bodies, but altered much in the way his victims had been. Their inner workings were nearly completely exposed to display the function of the body, and their faces had been dissected in a very particular manner. Regardless of the physical limitations the real bodies had, these sketches showed exactly what Matthis had been intending with his transformations. They were exalted. They had gained a higher form.

The writing was what truly entranced Hannibal, though. They were written in verse, almost like scripture. They spoke of a higher form of being, and of what could be achieved through transformation. Hannibal had yet to read all of what was written there, but he was beginning

to believe the boy had ideas of the future evolution of the human body, perhaps hallucinations he took as visions.

“Interesting,” Will mused aloud, pacing around in his cell as he looked over the pictures, “He certainly fits the profile to a T. Has he confessed?”

Hannibal shook his head lightly.

“I rather think he sees no reason to, at this point,” he answered, “He has not been told we suspect him so seriously.”

Will’s lips twitched up into a smile for only a moment and he nodded thoughtfully.

“Clever. Jack managed not to spook him, then. That’s good. For you, not mister Hayd.”

Hannibal nodded.

“I wonder who you would be rooting for if you were on this side of the bars,” Hannibal considered, “You certainly seem to have an interest in his activity, and no motivation to help us other than your current state.”

Will grimaced and bared his teeth in almost a snarl.

“This boy would be on my chopping block if I were on the other side of these bars,” he stated with venom, “he is rash and overconfident. He would put all other killers in a bad light. Killers like him are the reason the rest of us are stigmatized as schizophrenics and psychopaths. I think he probably suffers from hallucinations, or he did. It’s that kind of thing that looks bad for us, and anyone who suffers from them without being a killer. We would be better off without him.”

Hannibal was curious why Will harbored such strong feelings against the boy, when he clearly didn’t have any reaction to seeing him, or any real reason for his animosity.

Will took a steadying breath and leveled his gaze.

“I would be on my own side. It would be you who would have to choose, not me.”

Now that was interesting. Did Will believe Hannibal held some affection for the FBI that might affect his decisions regarding his own hobbies? He had thought he had made it fairly clear that he was independent of their influences.

Hannibal pulled another file from his briefcase and held it up to show Will. They silently agreed to exchange their files, and Will put his into the drawer. Hannibal extracted it and replaced it with the fresh one for Will to see.

Hannibal was close enough to see Will’s pupils blow wide when he opened the file and saw the first picture.

Will smiled.

“So, our friend has come back. How courteous of them to wait until I was available again before releasing their new masterpiece.”

Hannibal didn’t respond, knowing he was not expected to, and knowing he may very well give something away to the listening Chilton if he did.

“Tell me, Doctor Lecter, did you get to see this scene in person? With your own eyes, and smell the fresh blood and fear in the air?”

Hannibal tipped his head.

“Jack did not ask me to the crime scene, no. I think it may have been beneficial to our profile if I had been, but I was able to view the body after it was brought to the lab.”

Will scoffed.

“That’s not the same,” he complained, “in the lab, the smells are covered by chemicals, and the positioning has been destroyed. It’s best to see them fresh as you can. To see the design of the killer, and stand where they stood to look upon their work. The lab cannot ever compare.”

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh.

“You are entirely right. There are many things one cannot see the same when the body has been stripped of its purposeful orientation. As it is, we have only my experience and these photos to base our observations off,” Hannibal agreed, “Will they suffice?”

Will chuffed and shrugged, leafing through the pictures.

There were plenty of pictures there, and Hannibal knew Will could have done his job with far fewer. He had been witness to Will’s amazing ability before, and knew Will was still holding out information. He had included every picture he could as a sort of treat for Will, knowing Will would enjoy being able to see every angle. It seemed to have been effective, as Will smiled absently and shuffled through them as if to put them in proper order.

“It’s the best I can get from here,” Will replied, his tone distant as he was clearly not completely present anymore, “so I’ll have to make do.”

Hannibal allowed him to look at the pictures in silence for a few minutes. It was gratifying to just be this near to him and be permitted to see his mind work.

“I think the rumors were right,” Will said finally, looking up to Hannibal, “This is the Ripper. We should be expecting one more body to drop before they go back into hiding. They have yet to complete the sounder. They won’t leave it unfinished.”

Hannibal smiled.

“The devil is in the details,” he replied calmly, “what gives them away?”

Will clicked his tongue in a reprimanding manner.

“I said before that the Ripper is a killer of very particular *taste*. They really let their victims *marinate* before they use them in their specific *recipe*. There will be nothing to connect any of the victims to the killer, at least nothing easy to find. The pigs are merely *tasteless* individuals who the Ripper has elected to *flavor.* The care taken in the preparation, and the *delicacy* with which it is presented. That is what gives them away.”

Hannibal grinned, knowing he was facing away from any cameras directed toward him. It was for Will alone.

Will returned the grin, baring his teeth in perfect order.

“What do you see through the eyes of this killer, Will?” Hannibal asked.

Will didn’t even blink. It seemed he didn’t need to slip into his mind to answer.

“A world teaming with crude and tasteless behavior, overcome with the rude and crass. They see it from above, because they do not stoop to the same level as the livestock they see all around. They are not god, but they are like god. They have the power to shape the world to their own image. They select individuals who have wasted their ability to choose, and make them not only an example, but an altar of sacrifice to the killer themself. They do not need to be worshiped or praised. Not by the swine. Only if they find someone who can stand on equal footing with themself will they desire recognition. They are an isolated deity.”

Hannibal swallowed, trying to push down the desire to free Will and seek to be worshiped, and worship in return. He had to be more patient. He was close. He just had to wait.

“Do you see them as worthy of worship, then?” Hannibal asked, tipping his head curiously. He managed to keep his tone neutral, but he knew by the look Will gave him that his reaction to the words had been noticed.

Will smirked.

“Are you asking if I would make a sacrifice to them if I could?” he replied, clearly teasing.

“If that is how you would worship,” Hannibal answered.

Will considered that.

“In a way, I already have,” he said, “and I have paid the price for my faith. Chilton has taken my books from me. It seems convincing my neighbor he is the Ripper is not a recommended recreational activity.”

Hannibal nodded, both wanting to laugh at Will’s humor and wanting to snarl at the way Chilton had been deciding to treat him.

“Any rational man would either kill you or give them back,” Hannibal said, perhaps with more venom than intended.

Will laughed.

“I’ve read them, Doctor,” Will assured, “I have Eidetic memory. I still have them, though I mourn their physical loss. It was nice to have something real in the world in order to gauge reality against.”

Hannibal took a breath.

“Indeed. I was glad to have been able to provide that for you, whether through our conversations or by giving you the books.”

It almost felt like a confession, though it should have been an attempt at manipulation on Hannibal’s part. He should have been trying to get Will to think of him as his only ally, and friend on the other side of the bars.

Then why did it feel he was baring his soul?

Will nodded somberly.

“I know.”

Improvements

“I am advocating for Will’s transfer to another facility,” Hannibal said.

Alana frowned at him curiously.

“Why?” she asked simply.

Hannibal knew she would wonder. It was an odd thing to do, much less discuss. Hannibal had expected her to inquire after his reasoning.

“Fredrick Chilton is interfering with my treatment,” he explained, “He does not care to consult me when making decisions concerning my patient. I find him disagreeable and difficult to work with. Will can only benefit from a change for the better, and I believe the FBI would benefit from it as well.”

Alana nodded, seeming to understand what he was saying, while still being curious.

“I agree,” she said, “but I’m not sure I understand why you are so invested. You rarely allow yourself to show that kind of passion for your patients, no matter what they are going through.”

Hannibal knew she was right, and he liked that she was so bright. He hadn’t been sure she would pick up on the discrepancy.

“There is nothing about Will Graham that is ordinary,” he said, “and I find myself leaning towards nearly extraordinary methods when it comes to his treatment.”

Alana looked as if she accepted that explanation.

“I would warn you to be careful, but I already have, and I know you always are,” she said, “I know Will is unique, but I also know that poses some dangers for you while you are treating him. I’m surprised he talks to you at all, and it makes me worry. Maybe I shouldn’t be as worried as I am, though. I know you are good at your job.”

Hannibal thought it was rather touching that she had such faith in him. He had done well with teaching her.

“Thank you,” he said, “I hope you do not worry too much on my behalf. I am being as delicate with the situation as I deem necessary. He certainly deserves my best efforts.”

Alana raised an eyebrow at him skeptically.

“You have a high opinion of him, considering the circumstances,” she noted, “Maybe I really should be worried.”

Hannibal smiled to reassure her.

“No, you really needn’t worry. I am capable of being objective about him even now. We have been having conversations for some time, and I have grown fond of our talks. I am not attached to him in any way that may be to my detriment.”

Alana laughed lightly.

“Alright,” she said, “I’ll let you do what you will then. I hope you’ll keep me up to date on how he’s doing.”

Hannibal nodded in agreement.

“Of course.”

“This is a mistake, Hannibal,” Chilton said, once again using Hannibal’s first name despite not having been invited to, “Do you really think anyone else will give you so much access to Will Graham? I’m your best bet.”

Hannibal offered a polite smile.

“I am aware of the risk of moving him, but I am quite sure the change will be beneficial for his health, if not for the investigation. That being said, I also have faith that whoever governs over the facility he transfers to Will be at least as amenable to my methods as you have been,” Hannibal replied, “and with all due respect, I have already made my decision on the matter. All that is left is to choose a facility I believe will give him proper treatment.”

Chilton was desperate not to lose the only genuine novelty in his grasp, and he was going to fight the change tooth and nail. It would be to Hannibal’s benefit, because his desperation would be seen as obsession to anyone who he tried to convince to his side.

His judgement was clouded by his own greed. His condition was exacerbated by the fact that Will had been responsible for making him seem a fool with Gideon’s actions. He did not want good attention to be on anyone other than himself. The transfer of the one verifiable monster in his grasp would show the flaws in his governing of the hospital.

All in all, it would be very well for Hannibal’s intentions all around.

Chilton huffed to show his disapproval, despite the fact that Hannibal very obviously did not mind it at all.

“I’m warning you now that I am going to do everything I can to make sure Will Graham never sees the outside of this hospital,” he said.

Hannibal nodded. He knew that very well, though there were a few things Chilton would not venture to do in order to keep Will under his care. Will Graham would be safe here for the time being, or Hannibal would carry out his own sentence on whoever he thought guilty.

“May I see my patient?” he asked at last, forcing Chilton to finally allow him to exit the conversation.

Chilton pressed his lips together unhappily, but gestured for Hannibal to leave.

Hannibal nodded in thanks and began the journey to Will's cell. As usual, the other patients made a cacophony of incomprehensible and inconsequential sounds that echoed around Hannibal as he walked. It was odd how quiet it always seemed near Will's cell.

Will hummed genially when Hannibal stood in front of the bars, and rolled off the bed in a smooth motion to stand and face him. He seemed pleased about something, and Hannibal felt he should be concerned. He found himself inexplicably pleased in return regardless.

"Is there more news on the Ripper case, or did you simply miss me?" Will asked.

Will must have been in a very good mood to have said that. It was not quite like him, but enough that Chilton would not have noticed the difference.

"I have asked to be allowed sessions outside of our case discussions for the remainder of your stay here," he replied calmly.

Will tipped his head and raised an eyebrow.

"I'm leaving?" he asked.

Hannibal nodded.

"If Jack and I manage to have our way," he answered, "I am advocating for a change of venue. Is that to your liking?"

Will considered it, glancing around his cell with a small smirk.

"I won't know until I know what the new venue is," he said, "But I can't imagine anything is much worse than here. Will I be getting my books back? Unless, of course, you were hoping to have them back. I've never been good at accepting gifts with grace."

Hannibal smiled at the thought. He would like to spoil Will with every luxury, and see how he blushed for it. He knew Will would blush. His fair complexion and inability to accept gifts would have given it away regardless of the other things Hannibal had noted.

"I believe I have something suitable in mind," Hannibal said, "and the books are the least of what I am hoping to gain in the move."

Will hummed, a pleased and considering sound. His eyes sparkled an aqua color as he smiled at Hannibal.

"Then I am satisfied," he concluded, "I trust your judgement concerning these things, and I anticipate the change."

Hannibal nodded.

"Thank you. How have you been since my last visit, Will? I hope nothing unpleasant has happened in my absence."

Will scoffed playfully.

“Are you my keeper now, Doctor Lecter? Protecting me from the evils of the world? Or are you protecting the world from my evils? How noble an endeavor, Doctor,” Will mused happily, “though I admit that makes you less interesting to talk with if it’s true.”

Hannibal smiled.

“I promise, Will, my motivation is not as selfless as that. I hope you continue to find me interesting, as I have not lost interest in speaking with you.”

Will grinned. He leaned froward slightly, once again nearly making a display of his lithe form. Hannibal envied the fact that Chilton would be able to watch him whenever he liked. If Chilton had even an ounce of appreciation for Will’s beauty, he would have the resources at his fingertips to watch this moment as many times as his heart desired.

Hannibal hoped for Fredick’s sake that he was ignorant. Or perhaps he didn’t.

“Glad to hear it, Doctor. What a bland place the world would be if there were no room for sin. You needn’t voice your opinion on that. I already know.”

Hannibal knew he did, and the knowledge was reinforced by the wicked edge in the smile Will gave him that bared his teeth.

Hannibal wanted so desperately to see Will outside of this environment. He wanted to view Will in the way he was meant to be. Release him to exact his righteous wrath onto the undeserving swine that would stand in his way.

“I imagine you do. There is very little that can hide from your keen perception,” Hannibal replied.

The slight tilt of Will’s head and the glimmer of his eyes as they shifted from green to blue was enough to make Hannibal feel content with his decision to take Will away from this place.

Better

Chapter Summary

Uh... Surprise?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The proceedings had gone far slower than Hannibal would have liked, but he had shown up with a polite smile to every meeting. He had given no room for doubt or argument against him. He had provided evidence and observations, opinions and conclusions. Everything he had needed to have Will moved. He had offered a suitable location for Will to be moved to. One that had proper security and care facilities.

It had been a long, and tedious ordeal, but Hannibal had come out victorious, as he had expected to.

One condition he had been happy to oblige was one Chilton himself had asked for.

Fredrick Chilton would be in the transport vehicle with Will Graham.

It was really much more convenient that way. If Hannibal believed in a god, he would almost think it was divine intervention.

There were only a few more preparations Hannibal needed to work out before the appointed day, and he was anticipating it with more excitement than he had perhaps ever felt before in his memory.

Hannibal cast one last look at the image on his computer. Will Graham, grinning and blood covered. It was something Hannibal adored. He hoped to be able to see Will that way personally very soon.

Hannibal closed the computer and slid it into his bag as he finished his preparations.

Hannibal waited along the side of the road, frowning at the gun in his hands.

He wasn’t fond of firearms. They were too impersonal. He preferred to be very near his victims when the light went from their eyes, and the final breath left their lungs.

There would be time enough for that later. As it was, this was the best tool for the job at hand.

Hannibal heard the procession of cars approach, and he readied himself. The transport van had an escort of police vehicles, but not as many as it really should.

Hannibal had left Will in his restraints as they drove. It was serving two purposes.

One: Will wouldn't be able to attack him while they were driving and cause either of them any harm in the process.

Two: Hannibal wasn't sure he would be able to focus on the road if Will were not in his straightjacket and muzzle. For multiple reasons.

The man in question had been silent for the majority of the journey so far. He just sat in the passenger seat, quietly observing Hannibal. Hannibal wanted to squirm in his gaze like a nervous child, but he held his composure. He wanted to know what Will was thinking, but he didn't trust himself to ask.

Chilton lay in the back seat, unconscious. He was unlikely to ever gain consciousness again, as far as Hannibal was concerned.

Before they reached any type of civilization, Hannibal pulled off the road and beckoned for Will to follow him to the trunk of the car.

"You cannot be seen like that," Hannibal explained, opening the trunk and pulling out a change of clothes for his companion.

He had gathered what Will's sizes were from the articles of clothing still in the authority's possession when he rifled through all the files on Will. He hoped the man had not been too malnourished during his stay in prison, though he thought it may not matter that much. Alana had told him Will was never very good at feeding himself.

Will grinned at him through the mask.

"I thought you liked the way I look, all trussed up like a meal," he teased.

Hannibal looked up in surprise, and had to swallow down a lump in his throat.

It wasn't untrue. There was something about the way Will wore the restraints that was terribly becoming of him. It should have made him look weak or vulnerable, but he wore it like armor, and looked even more dangerous in it.

"Regardless," Hannibal said, tearing his eyes away and busying himself with other items in the trunk, "you must change. I don't intend us to be caught."

Will huffed a soft laugh, leaving a puff of steam on the inside of the mask.

"Very well, Doctor. Care to release me?"

Hannibal looked back up and Will had already turned around to give him access to the buckles that held his arms in place. Hannibal had to steady himself. He was nearly trembling with anticipation.

He had been imagining what actually touching Will would be like for so long now, and he had been postponing the actual act for fear it would prove unremarkable. He had no more time to waste.

Hannibal reached out and briskly unfastened the buckled, loosening the straps that held Will's arms in place. Wherever his fingers brushed against the firm muscle of Will's back and sides, his fingers lit up like fire, and his skin buzzed with energy. He knew it was probably just his mind creating the reaction from his expectation, but it was thrilling nonetheless.

Once that was done, he turned quickly back to his task of organizing items.

Will removed the straightjacket and flexed his shoulders, rolling his neck and humming with pleasure at the sensation of the fresh air against his skin. Hannibal watched him from his periphery as he turned and looked around where the sun shone on the trees and foliage nearby. It wasn't until Will reached up and unfastened the straps that held the mask on his face that he turned back toward Hannibal.

Hannibal turned to ask Will which shirt he would prefer, but Will grabbed him by the front of his suit.

Hannibal didn't have time to react before Will had pulled him into a rough kiss. Hannibal could feel the scruff of Will's short beard, and could smell the sweat on his skin.

Will pulled away and looked at Hannibal thoughtfully.

"Been a while," he said with a smirk, "last time someone was that close to me, they lost a finger."

Hannibal nodded silently, not trusting his voice quite yet.

Will Graham was the only person Hannibal had ever met who could surprise him. It was thrilling, and terrifying. He could not predict what Will might do in any given moment.

Hannibal held up two shirts. One was green, and the other blue. He offered them to Will, who considered them for a moment before taking the green one with a nod. Hannibal put the other back and handed Will some jeans.

He would have liked to give him a suit, but he knew it would be easier to convince the man to wear more plain clothing, and they didn't have time for anything more at the moment.

"We really should be quick," Hannibal said once he was sure of his ability to speak, "and be on our way."

Will nodded and shucked off his prison clothes, seeming not to care that Hannibal was there. Hannibal couldn't help but stare at the muscles that moved and shifted under Will's pale skin. Will slipped into his new outfit with ease and looked at Hannibal expectantly.

“We should get rid of those as soon as possible,” Hannibal said, gesturing to the bloodstained prison clothes and restraints.

Will looked down at them and frowned.

“Even the muzzle?” he asked coyly, “I thought you would enjoy keeping it around for a while. I know you are particularly fond of it.”

It really was tempting, but Hannibal still didn’t know if he could really trust Will or his intentions.

“I know where we can dispose of them,” he said, instead of addressing Will’s suggestion, “It is only down this road a bit farther. Here. If you would get in again, please.”

Hannibal handed Will some socks and shoes, picking up the discarded articles of clothing for disposal. Will sighed and got back into the passenger seat, starting to put on the socks.

Once they were closer to their destination, and it had been silent for another long while, Will spoke up.

“So, I assume you don’t intend to kill me at the moment,” he said.

Hannibal glanced over at him. Will was staring out the window, not seeming too concerned about anything at the time. His gaze was distant, but he already looked more healthy than Hannibal had ever seen him.

“No,” he answered truthfully, “I do not intend to kill you unless you make it necessary. I would see it as a great loss.”

Will huffed a soft laugh.

“The Chesapeake Ripper is sentimental?”

Hannibal hummed noncommittally.

“That has yet to be seen,” he said, “for now, I intend to learn about you. I am intrigued.”

Will laughed aloud at that, visibly relaxing and showing signs of fatigue.

“So, I get to live until you get bored of me?” he asked, sounding more amused than actually worried.

“I see no reason for that to be the case,” Hannibal replied, “I am merely being honest about my intentions. I intend to learn everything about you, in every capacity I am able.”

Will hummed, seeming amused at the prospect.

“Every capacity,” he mused to himself.

Hannibal let him mull it over as they drove. He disposed of the prison articles, honestly sad to see some of them go. He held onto the knowledge that he actually might be able to retrieve them later due to the nature of the receptacle he was placing them in.

No need to tell Will that, though.

Hannibal drove until the ocean opened up beside them, and Will grinned at the horizon. The sun began to set, and Hannibal pulled up to the house on the bluff.

Will got out of the car before Hannibal had switched the engine off, and he headed straight for the cliff. Hannibal didn't worry about his intentions as he did. Will was not self-destructive as far as he could tell.

Hannibal allowed Will to stand and watch the ocean below as he unpacked the car and carried things into the house. There were only a few things he had brought in the car with them. Most everything they would need was already here. He had been ready. Chilton was really the largest and most difficult thing, but Hannibal was used to that kind of burden. He didn't mind in the least.

Hannibal watched Will for a few minutes before calling him in for dinner. He sent Will off to shower as he prepared the food, and smiled to himself.

He was finally going to have the chance to feed Will Graham.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know, fam. I just wrote, and I guess this is where we are now. I have plans for it to keep going, so no worries about this being the end just yet. I just hadn't expected this to be THIS chapter, if you know what I mean.

I hope you enjoyed it.

Shock

“I’m going to warn you right now,” Will said as they sat down to dinner, “I’m going to be a bit out of things mentally for a day or so. Being in prison for so long was not good for me. I have to undo all the damage.”

Hannibal nodded, curious despite himself.

“I understand, though I wonder how you may be able to undo the damage. Most would consider it irreparable.”

Will shrugged.

“The damage from my encephalitis. That’s irreparable. It’s actually scarring on my brain. This stuff, what I had to do to survive in there, most of it I can fix. I’m not sure who I’ll be on the other side of it, but I can’t keep this up for long.”

Hannibal nodded again. It would be interesting to see what Will was like during and after his healing process.

Will took a bite of food and closed his eyes, smiling a bit to himself. The sight was breathtaking, and Hannibal found himself staring despite himself. Will gave a pleased hum and opened his eyes again. His pupils were wide, like when he had seen Hannibal’s artwork.

“Your passion for cooking shows,” he said, “though perhaps my opinion is warped by the atrocious excuse for sustenance I have been eating for the past few years. Either way, thank you for the food.”

Hannibal smiled, taking a sip of his wine.

“I have been told I am quite good,” he replied smoothly, “and I am pleased to have the chance to cook for you at last.”

Will huffed a soft laugh and nodded.

“You mentioned wanting to, during our second conversation,” he remembered, “and I suspect the source of the meat was selected fairly soon afterward.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

“I was actually unsure I would be able to procure this particular pig for our first meal together,” he said, “but fate must have been on our side. I am pleased with how everything has worked out so far.”

Will smiled, but he seemed worried about something. His emotions were not as clean and clear as Hannibal had usually seen them. He wondered if it was a side effect of Will’s mental state now that he was no longer incarcerated.

“Sometimes things just work out that way,” Will agreed, though his voice was soft and distant.

They ate mostly in silence, and it was a comfortable atmosphere between them. They were mutually lost in thought, and aware of the other enough to be considerate. It was enjoyable.

Hannibal showed Will around the house after dinner.

“This is the room I prepared specifically for you,” Hannibal said, showing Will into his room.

Will walked in, his head turning to look at everything. His eyes grew wide, and crinkled at the edges when he turned to Hannibal.

“These are mine,” he said.

Hannibal was once again glad he had managed to get his hands on some of Will’s actual possessions from his life before. There was a case of his hand made flies, several of his books, and most of the tools and materials he would need to make more flies.

“I procured everything I could from your original possessions,” Hannibal confirmed, “this was all there was available. I do hope you are pleased.”

Once again, Will moved too fast, catching Hannibal and pulling him into a kiss before he could react. Hannibal was in a better position to react, this time. He set his hands on Will’s hips and pulled him close.

It was strange, and perfect, to be able to touch and taste Will after all this time. Hannibal remembered the desire he had felt when Will was beyond his reach.

Will pressed him up against the wall, and bit at Hannibal’s lips like the wild thing Hannibal knew he was. It was exactly as Hannibal imagined.

Pulling away, Will shook his head.

“I can’t promise that’s going to happen again,” he said, “since I can’t predict what I’m going to be like after I undo everything Chilton did to me. I just want you to know that.”

Hannibal nodded, though he was sad at the idea. He had worked so hard to get here. He just had to wait and hope they could come back to this point after Will fixed what he could in his mind.

“I understand, Will. I am pleased I was able to make you happy.”

Will grinned and dropped his head against Hannibal’s chest.

“Y’know, I really am. I didn’t think that was possible anymore. I guess we’ll have to see what I’m like in a couple of days. I’m sorry I can’t tell you anything more solid about that.”

“You needn’t worry, Will,” Hannibal said, pulling away and straightening his clothes, “I am satisfied for the time being. Now, please make yourself comfortable for the night. I imagine you are tired, and would appreciate a proper bed to sleep in. Goodnight, Will.”

Will nodded and closed the door once Hannibal was on the other side of it.

Hannibal went about cleaning up after dinner, and getting himself ready for bed. He made preparations for what he had planned for breakfast the next morning and secured the entire house before he turned off the lights and slid into his own bed.

It was odd to know Will was there, but not be able to feel his presence near.

The scream woke Hannibal with a start.

For once, it was not his own nightmare that had woken him in the dead of night. He got out of bed and made his way to Will’s room. The door was unlocked, so he slowly opened it and peered in.

Will was laying in bed, drenched in sweat despite the fact he had kicked the covers off the bed already. He was trembling all over, and periodically let out a sharp sound of distress.

Hannibal wasn’t sure his presence would be welcome, but he took the chance and made his way over to Will’s bed. Will was mumbling rapidly and nonsensically, his pupils darting back and forth under his eyelids.

Hannibal sat down on the edge of the bed and reached out.

When Hannibal’s hand met the hot skin of Will’s forehead, the man opened his eyes and froze in place. He stared at the ceiling for a moment before he looked over to where Hannibal was watching him silently.

“Sorry I woke you,” he said coarsely, “I should have warned you not to come. I have nightmares.”

Hannibal pressed his lips together. It was concerning that Will was so warm. He wasn’t quite to the point of feverish, but Hannibal didn’t want to take any chances with Will’s health if he didn’t have to.

“I was not informed you experienced any nightmares while under Fredrick’s care,” he remembered, keeping his tone quite in case Will had a headache. It would make sense if he did, going by his temperature alone.

Will shook Hannibal’s hand off and moved to sit up. He undid the buttons of his pajama shirt, and Hannibal realized this was probably why he had only had T-shirts for sleepwear before his incarceration.

“I can control it, to a point,” he explained, shucking the wet fabric off his shoulders and shivering once, “but the shock of today’s events must have compromised those walls. This

isn’t exactly a prison cot, either.”

Will gestured to the bed, and Hannibal nodded.

“I had hoped you would sleep better on a proper mattress, after so long being neglected,” he admitted.

Will laughed softly, smiling.

“Don’t worry. I’ll get over it soon. I’m sure I’ll be way less sore in the morning too. I don’t hold it against you that I don’t sleep well.”

Hannibal certainly was pleased to hear that. He felt curiously anxious to gain Will’s approval. He had thought he was over that need, having considered them equals while they had their conversations, but he found himself peculiarly wanting reassurance that he was accepted.

They sat in silence for a moment, Hannibal considering his odd reactions to the other man, and Will studying the slight changes in his expression in the reflected moonlight.

“You have nightmares too,” Will stated quietly, reaching out and taking one of Hannibal’s hands.

Hannibal stared at where they touched, unsure he could trust himself to understand reality as it was.

“Not as often now as I used to,” he agreed, “but I admit it was a new experience to be awoken by a nightmare that was not my own.”

Will smiled and nodded.

“I guess the images we have been showing the world are neither really reflective of who we are,” he said.

Hannibal only nodded softly.

They sat in silence again, though now it was more comforting than anything. A recognition that neither of them were alone anymore. Each taking solace in the presence of the other.

Reworking

Hannibal prepared breakfast, feeling more calm than the day before, but still light on his toes with anticipation of what a new day may bring when he had such interesting company.

He answered his phone calmly when it rang, and was met with Jack's rough and angry voice.

"Will Graham escaped."

Hannibal allowed himself a pause to mimic surprise.

"How?" he asked, pausing his food preparations so Jack wouldn't hear it and think he was taking the conversation lightly.

Jack huffed unhappily.

"He had help. Someone ambushed the transfer van on its way to the hospital in Philadelphia. All the officers and orderlies are dead. Chilton is missing. I'm concerned about your safety."

Hannibal smiled lightly. How considerate of Jack to be worried for him.

"Will is not going to come after me," he stated, "and if he were so inclined, he would not be able to find me in my current location. No need to worry on my behalf, Jack."

Jack grunted, clearly not satisfied with that.

"I'm going to put surveillance on your house here in Baltimore," he said, "in case he goes there to find you. It's good you happen to be out of town right now. Care to explain why he wouldn't come after you?"

"I am happy to explain," Hannibal replied, "Will Graham works on a very clear reciprocating system of actions. I gave him information, and he returned the favor. I extended courtesy, and he extended the same. He expressed to me the fear of escaping for the obligation of returning some sort of favor to whomever would help him. I have done nothing to earn his ire or wrath. He would consider it unfair and rude to harm me after such. If he has escaped by his own volition, he will not desire to contact me and put me in an uncomfortable position."

Jack huffed. He wasn't happy about it, but Hannibal could tell he trusted his judgement on the matter.

"Alright. I'm still going to put surveillance on your house, and I want a detail on you when you come back if he hasn't been caught yet. I'm not taking any chances with him."

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

"A very good idea," he said, "I will stay in touch so you may rest assured I have not been attacked or harmed. Do you have anyone else you are concerned for?"

There was a pause before Jack spoke again.

“I was hoping you could tell me who else I should be concerned for,” he confessed, “you know Will’s state of mind better than anyone.”

Hannibal smiled. He was glad to have that reputation. He *should* be considered the only authority on Will Graham. He wanted to be the only one who knew him truly.

“I would certainly be concerned for Doctor Chilton, though I suppose there is little to be done in that area now. I rather think you might be in danger as well, Jack. Will showed a level of animosity towards you in our discussions. He may blame you for his incarceration to begin with. Other than that, I am afraid I do not know enough about the people in his life to be a reliable guide for you.”

Jack was quiet for a moment.

“Alright. Thank you, Doctor Lecter. Enjoy the rest of your vacation, and remember to check in. If you don’t, I’m tracking your phone signal and sending an entire swat team to find you.”

Hannibal chuckled lightly.

“Understood. Goodbye for now, Jack.”

“Goodbye.”

Hannibal put away his phone and returned to breakfast preparations. That was one more thing out of the way. He now knew he was not under suspicion, and did not have to be concerned about when Jack would choose to contact him.

Hannibal heard Will’s footsteps approach as he finished plating the protein scramble, and he turned with the dishes to greet his companion.

“Good morning, Will,” he said cheerfully, “I have made breakfast. I thought you might enjoy something rather simple, though I assure you it is a nutritious meal to begin the day with. A simple protein scramble.”

Will nodded silently, standing awkwardly as Hannibal had never seen him. Hannibal led him to the table and set the plates down in front of the chairs.

Will ate in silence for a long while, only speaking when he was nearly done with his food.

“What do you want from me?” he asked at length.

Hannibal considered that.

Will had told him before that he hadn’t attempted to escape for not wanting to be indebted to anyone who had offered the opportunity. Hannibal hadn’t thought before about any reciprocation from Will.

What had he wanted when he had decided to take Will away from the prison? What was his motivation in all of this?

“Intelligent company, to start with,” he answered calmly, “understanding, if it is offered. I suppose my appreciation for beauty in all things has contributed to my desire for your company in no small amount as well.”

Will frowned at that. Hannibal knew he was confused.

“When was the last time you considered your appearance, Will?” Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged.

“I didn’t exactly spend hours in front of the mirror, thinking about how I look,” he replied, “are you trying to say you find me attractive?”

Will raised an eyebrow with his question, but still did not meet Hannibal’s gaze.

Hannibal smiled.

“Not merely in the physical sense,” he answered, “I find your mind to be more radiant and fascinating than any other, first and foremost. There are many things about you I find attractive. You need only ask, and I would tell you everything I see when I look at you.”

Will blushed lightly and shook his head.

“No need to do that,” he objected quickly, “I mean. I told you I’m not going to be very coherent today. I don’t know why I asked in the first place. Forget I said anything.”

Hannibal laughed softly.

“No worries, Will, though there is very little chance I will ever forget anything you have said to me.”

Will’s blush darkened and he shoved the rest of his food into his mouth unceremoniously. He stood and carried his plate into the kitchen without another word. Hannibal heard him rinse the dish and his fork before placing them into the dishwasher.

It was odd to see Will acting this way. He didn’t seem to have as much confidence as Hannibal had grown used to from him.

Once he was done with his mental refinement, Hannibal would ask him about it.

He just hoped it would be clear when he was finished.

Will had only been leaving his room for meals, and it had been two days. Will’s nightmares had woken Hannibal once since the initial incident, but the door had been locked, barring him entrance.

Hannibal was growing more concerned with every hour that passed, but he refused to interrupt the important process Will was undergoing. He knew it would take time, though he had no experience with Will's level of empathy in such a situation, so he had no idea how much time.

Hannibal hoped Will was enjoying his fly tying gear and books he had been able to bring him. He had also provided books that he thought Will might enjoy, without them having been his previously.

Hannibal played out a few tunes on his harpsichord, trying to distract himself from the internal debate about if he should try to lure Will out of his room.

He had not expected their first days together to be like this.

Hannibal was aware of the shift in the atmosphere before he actually heard the sound of Will's breathing. He had managed to walk into the study with silent steps, which made Hannibal smile before he turned to greet his companion.

"Hello, Will," he said genially, studying the other man.

Will ran a hand over his short beard and frowned. He didn't meet Hannibal's eyes.

"I'd like to shave," he said at last, "and I think it'll probably help to keep me from being recognized. At least if I go clean shaved. I don't typically do that. Maybe I'll even shave my head."

At the last thought, Hannibal grimaced.

"I can provide you with a razor on one condition," he said, "You leave your curls intact. If I provide a razor and you shave your head, I will lock you away until your hair grows back."

Will did look up at that, and the ghost of a smile flickered over his face.

"You think you'd be *able* to lock me up?" he asked curiously.

Hannibal considered it.

"Don't you?"

Will hummed in thought, leaning back on the plush chair he had taken up. He mulled over it for a moment.

"Maybe," he conceded, "I've seen your work. I bet I could put up a good fight, though. You shouldn't underestimate my motivation to retain my freedom after finally getting it. I admit my body has been somewhat neglected."

Hannibal smiled. Will sounded much more like himself now.

"Alright," Will said at last, "the hair stays. I still want a razor to get rid of this beard."

Hannibal nodded in agreement.

Reforming

Chapter Notes

> Posting a day early, because I have been informed that the 23rd is Fannibal appreciation day. So, to all you fannibals out there: YOU ARE APPRECIATED!
>
> Y'all make my day a little better when I hear from you, so here you go.

When Will emerged, Hannibal felt his breath catch in his throat. He hadn't expected to be so affected by the sight of the man without his beard. Will looked younger, and very nearly angelic.

Will ran a hand through his hair, seeming nervous or uncomfortable. He didn't meet Hannibal's eyes as they approached each other.

"My hair is too long," he stated.

Hannibal raised a hand and ran his own fingers through the soft curls. It was true they were quite unruly, and the ends were all split.

"Thank you for not shaving it away," Hannibal replied, somewhat distractedly, "If you wish, I can cut your hair for you."

Will made a face, but didn't say anything for a moment, staring at Hannibal's tie as Hannibal continued to card his hand through the hair he had been admiring since their first meeting. It was incredibly satisfying to finally have the opportunity to touch Will. Hannibal had not been disappointed yet by any of it.

Will nodded after a time, wetting his lips and looking away.

"Alright. You can cut my hair," he said, "I think I'd garner too much attention if I went anywhere looking this ridiculous."

Hannibal hummed and pressed a kiss to Will's forehead, hoping he was not overstepping his bounds with the action.

"I think you look as delightful as ever," he said.

A light blush colored Will's cheeks, and Hannibal marveled at it. Will was certainly different now, but he had yet to discover to what extent.

Will had sarcastically forbidden Hannibal of keeping any cut locks of his hair.

Hannibal was disappointed, but had refused to let Will know that. He swept the shed hair away into the trash and put Will in front of a mirror.

Will looked at himself like a stranger. He didn't seem to recognize the face that looked back, but he smiled a bit.

"I look like a damn teenager," he said, laughing a bit, "good luck recognizing me, Jack. Never seen me without scruff."

Hannibal smiled too, glad to see Will pleased with his work. He had taken longer than was strictly necessary to finish, going slowly and cutting carefully. He had not worried about making a mistake as much as he had dreaded the loss of contact upon completion.

Will looked stunning, standing confident again and tossing his head to test the length of his hair. Hannibal had not anticipated exactly how attractive Will would look once he had cleaned up.

Will turned to Hannibal after a few minutes and tilted his head.

"Care to share your thoughts, Doctor?" he asked, seeming the happiest he had been since the escape.

Hannibal allowed himself to look over Will in his entirety.

"I must say you look quite dangerous," he said, earning a confused frown from Will, "at least for my peace of mind."

Will laughed at that, tossing his head back. His hair fell away from his face and he looked lovely.

"Then I suppose my goal has been achieved," Will said with a wink.

Hannibal was enamored, now more than ever.

"I would like to suggest a change of wardrobe," he ventured, "to compliment your new appearance. I believe it would help you look less juvenile."

Will raised a skeptical brow.

"Are you gonna recommend I start wearing tailored, three piece suits like yours? Plaid and paisley and pinstripes?"

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh and shook his head.

"Not quite," he offered instead, "but I do have a few options, if you would follow me."

Hannibal started to lead the way to his closet, feeling Will follow curiously. He was excited despite himself, having imagined Will wearing nicer clothes many times. He hoped beyond

hope that Will would agree to something he had.

Hannibal quickly made his way to the clothes he had chosen specifically for Will. It had been mostly hopeful, but he was glad he had purchased them now. Even the chance to see Will try them on would be well worth it.

“I do have one suit that I thought, specifically, would compliment you well,” Hannibal said, holding out the hanger for Will’s inspection, “but I understand if it is not to your taste. I have other options as well for you.”

Will reached out and took the hanger from Hannibal, running his gaze over the clothes there with something akin to disbelief.

“So, a three piece suit, but it’s just plain blue?” he asked, investigating the jacket.

Hannibal nodded.

“The louder patterns and colors would make you seem pale and small if you wore them,” he explained, “but that color would accentuate your strong features and light complexion.”

Will considered that for a moment.

“I get more tan when I spend time in the sun,” he said, though it didn’t sound like he was trying to make an excuse not to wear the suit. He rubbed the fabric between his fingers.

Hannibal selected a few other hangers he thought Will might be amenable to, feeling a slight thrill at the idea that he was about to actually have Will wear what he chose.

“Of course, you needn’t wear a suit every day,” Hannibal continued as he laid the options out on the bed for Will to peruse, “and I find the more casual looks to be suited to you as well. Of course, as your complexion darkens with your proper diet and outdoor activities, I may amend a few choices to better suit you.”

Hannibal paused in his work for a moment, realizing Will was no longer giving his input. He looked around and found the man sitting in a chair, staring at the suit he was still holding. He seemed to be in somewhat of a daze.

Hannibal walked over and gently laid his hand on Will’s shoulder, unsure what he should do in this situation.

“Will, are you alright?” he asked.

Will furrowed his brow and looked up at him.

“It’s going to be weird,” Will said at length, “getting used to having options like this again. For so long now, I didn’t get to choose what I wore, or ate, or did, or where I went or when I did anything. The only thing I could control was myself, and now I feel like I can actually have an impact again. I guess that’s weird to be thinking about when we’re supposed to be talking about clothes, though.”

Hannibal huffed a soft, amused laugh.

“If it is overwhelming, let me know, and I will stop whatever it is I am doing,” he promised, “whether it be cooking, speaking, or anything else. You are going through quite the atmosphere shock, and I am a psychiatrist. I understand.”

Will smiled absently and nodded.

“What are you going to do with Chilton?” he asked after a moment.

Hannibal nodded, accepting the change of topic.

“I have a few designs prepared. I had rather hoped you would help me, if only to choose the final draft. He is not yet dead, as I prefer them to be fresh, as you know.”

Will smiled, real and amused this time.

“Yeah. I know. Could I consider the options at dinner? I’ll even wear the suit. It seems appropriate for the occasion.”

Hannibal felt a rush of victory, but managed to school his expression and not let Will know.

“Of course. You may take these clothes back to your room and try them each at your leisure,” he said, “I do not have any expectations of what you will choose to wear going forward.”

Will tipped his head and fixed Hannibal with a look. It was exactly how he had looked at Hannibal from behind the bars of his cell, and it reminded Hannibal that this was indeed the same person he had been talking to for some time.

“You don’t have any expectations, but you do have some hopes, right?” Will asked.

Hannibal took a steadying breath and nodded softly.

“You are aware of my hopes. I do not wish to make you feel obligated to fulfill them.”

Without giving Will the opportunity to answer, Hannibal turned and left the room. He didn’t trust himself to continue the conversation, and he wasn’t sure what he could expect Will to say after that. The safest option for him at that moment was to return to the kitchen, where everything went how he wanted and expected.

He would prepare something for lunch, even if it was a bit early to be doing so. He needed to clear his head.

Returning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will had left the house for the first time since they had arrived.

He had said he was going for a jog, and Hannibal had happily told him to enjoy himself.

Hannibal had underestimated how nerve wracking it would be to not know where he was, and what was happening to him. There was one person in the entire world who had the power to destroy Hannibal Lecter, and he was going for a jog along the bluff, where Hannibal could not keep track of him.

It was not a sensation Hannibal had experienced before, nor had he anticipated it.

Hannibal was torn between wanting to trust Will, and fearing that was a poor decision. Will was not predictable, and may have been playing a game with Hannibal longer than he had thought. Will might have gained Hannibal's trust only to get to this point and betray him. He may have planned to escape only to have Hannibal be his replacement in that prison.

Despite all these technically logical fears, the thought that most bothered Hannibal was that of something happening *to* Will.

Will had not yet regained all the strength Hannibal knew he had once possessed, and his mental state rose and fell like the tide. Will would be confident and teasing one moment, and then unsure and skittish the next. Hannibal could not predict what stimulus might meet the man out of his reach, or what reactions they might incite. He might collapse, from either exhaustion or a mental break. He might be caught, or venture into town where that would be inevitable despite the small changes they had made to his appearance. He might fall and hurt himself, away from anyone who could help him aside from Hannibal, and Hannibal would be none the wiser, patiently awaiting his return.

Hannibal tried valiantly for as long as he could to avoid the dangerous thoughts that knocked ever so politely on the outside of his skull, seeking admittance.

After a time, it simply became too much, and he set out to find where Will had gone. He would be able to excuse it away as a summons to dinner, if the question was asked, though he knew it would not be. Will seemed to always understand his intentions, and rarely used them against him.

Hannibal found Will sitting on a bench overlooking the sea. He was staring at the horizon, and Hannibal left the Bentley to join him. He studied the other for a moment before sitting beside him, gauging his mental state.

They sat in silence for a moment, both watching the distant sky while acutely aware of the presence of the other beside them.

“You were worried about me,” Will said. His tone was distant, non-judgmental, and flat, as if he were describing some past happening that he did not feel strongly about.

Hannibal only nodded in silence. The confirmation was not needed. They both knew it, yet they reacted to each other’s actions as if it were a well rehearsed fairy tale.

“I’ve never had anyone worry about me the way you do,” he continued, a self-deprecating smile flickering over his face, “I guess that must say something about me. Only the Chesapeake Ripper can love me.”

Hannibal hadn’t put the word love to what he felt before, but as Will spoke it rang true. It was not the same love as others felt, nor was it tame and simple. It was a wildfire that threatened to consume him in his entirety, but he walked into it confidently and willingly.

“Perhaps it is simply a matter of what type of mind can truly understand and see the beauty of who you are,” Hannibal replied, matching Will’s tone in distance and emotion, “and a recognition of both the darkness and the light within you.”

Will laughed softly and closed his eyes. His dark lashes fluttered against his cheeks and he tilted his head back. A soft, salty breeze ruffled his hair and carried the scent of him to Hannibal.

“There is an agreement among most people,” he said, “in order to enjoy the best of each other, they must ignore the worst. I have never wanted that from anyone, and I have never offered it.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

“You do not ignore what in others might be seen as bad, nor do you particularly enjoy that in them which is good,” he mused aloud, “and you wish for your own qualities to be recognized, and accepted, rather than categorized and given arbitrary measures of value.”

Will smiled, and his eyelashes were wet, though no tears fell down his face.

“No matter what I gave you, you always took it with a smile,” Will said, “and you offered equal darkness in return. I should have been scared by that, don’t you think?”

Hannibal sighed softly, feeling as if they were finally coming to a point where they could be perfectly understood by one another.

“I have had moments of fear when considering you,” he confessed, “but the hope of what you are has brought us here, past it.”

Will opened his eyes and stared at Hannibal as if he were seeing him for the first time. Small droplets of tears clung to his lashes and glittered in the light. Hannibal knew Will had always seen him, but he thought perhaps this was the first time Will knew it as well.

“What am I?” Will asked softly, searching Hannibal’s face for something.

“My match, in every way,” Hannibal replied simply.

Will smiled.

“Then let’s get back so we can have dinner.”

Will studied each sketch with the eye of an art critic. His hair was combed perfectly, and the top buttons of his shirt left undone. The suit truly did look as good as Hannibal had hoped, and the fact that Will had foregone the tie to style it to better suit him was all the better.

“You are really a fan of the classical art,” Will mused, moving to a new design.

The comment was not meant as either insult or compliment. It was simply the truth. Will had a way of making even those simple statements sound as if they held meanings beyond the world they lived in.

Hannibal watched as Will considered them each and grew slowly frustrated. His brow furrowed, and he chewed his lower lip. Hannibal wasn’t sure what was wrong, but he wanted to fix it.

“Is something wrong, Will?” he asked after a while.

Will shook his head and huffed softly.

“None of them are right,” he said, sounding upset at the fact, “It’s not your fault. I’ve been under his “care” for years, and none of these are humiliating enough for him. He doesn’t deserve to be a part of any of these.”

Hannibal understood the sentiment. He was unable to imagine what it would be like to have Fredrick Chilton watching his every move for years. He knew it had done damage to Will, and he wanted to treat him appropriately.

“Will, what is your design?” Hannibal asked, “You understand me well enough to make whatever we do fit with the sounder. In my eyes, he deserves to be your victim more than mine. What would you have me do?”

Will closed his eyes, and his features softened with a small smile.

“Do you really trust me that much?” he asked.

Hannibal knew there was no reason he should trust Will. He had just escaped prison, and was certifiably insane. The man was a killer.

But so was Hannibal.

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

I am once again asking for your input.

I have written a few more chapters, and could end this fic there, with an open but satisfactory ending.
OR... I could write more. I have plenty more ideas for these two, and I just need to know what you all think about where the story is at the moment. I could keep this story going for a long time yet, but I want to know if that sounds like something you all want.

Thanks.

Conjoined

Hannibal was up to his elbows in Fredrick Chilton's innards, and he felt a new sense of anticipation that had not accompanied his kills for years. Will watched, his pupils wide and his cheeks colored with excitement. He would give an instruction every so often, but mostly watched.

Hannibal had never mutilated a body in exactly this way, but he trusted Will that it would achieve the desired look. Will's imagination had no match, and Hannibal found himself inexplicably drawn to fulfilling whatever concepts it could conjure.

"I wish he could feel it," Will said, moving in close behind Hannibal to peer over his shoulder.

Hannibal felt his flesh light up with electricity at the proximity, but he kept his hands steady and fixed on their task.

"It would be impractical," Hannibal said, reminding them both.

Will huffed softly, his breath tickling the hairs on the back of Hannibal's neck.

"I know. It's just a shame, don't you think? All this *suffering* , while he's peacefully in oblivion. The best thing about this is knowing the hospital can't possibly be put under worse management."

Hannibal chuckled softly.

"I would have to agree with that. Is there a reason you wish for me to be the *only* one getting my hands dirty?" he asked, only half joking.

Will stepped forward and placed his hands on Hannibal's elbows, guiding his arms through the next action. His breath was on Hannibal's neck and jaw now as he pressed close.

"Maybe I like the way you look, covered in blood," he whispered, "and you already spent enough time admiring *me* in that state. I know all about it, Doctor Lecter. I'm just returning the favor."

Hannibal felt a shiver run up his spine, and he grew warm all over. He wanted to be angry that he was in such a situation where he could not react to Will's touches in the way he wanted. In truth, he found the thought still more exciting. He kept his hands steady as Will used his leverage to guide them through the next few motions, and even when Will released them to wrap his arms around Hannibal's waist. Hannibal felt his breath catch, but he was fortunate enough to be able to keep his hands from trembling.

"You know," Will continued, his voice low in Hannibal's ear, "I imagined what it would be like, once I got out and had you kill him for me."

Hannibal was growing more anxious to be done with every second Will was pressed up to him.

“Is this how you imagined it?” he asked, managing to keep his voice even as well, to his own amazement.

Will hummed, running his nose along Hannibal’s jaw and behind his ear.

“Not exactly,” he confessed, “I’m typically a very tactile person. I prefer a very *physical* approach, as opposed to your more clinical technique.”

Will let his fingers knead the flesh of Hannibal’s sides.

“But I have to admit this gives me an unexpected advantage. I don’t think many people get you like this, do they?”

Hannibal carefully measured his breaths as he went through the next few steps of preparing the body. Will was doing everything in his power to distract him, but he was determined not to disappoint him with the results of the display.

“No one,” he agreed.

Will hummed, pleased. He ran his tongue flat against Hannibal’s pulse.

“Has anyone else tried?”

Hannibal swallowed, and Will hummed at the feeling of his throat moving under his lips.

“Yes.”

Will pulled his lips back and grazed his teeth over the skin of Hannibal’s throat. Hannibal shivered, but he was almost done. He only had a few more minutes to work before he could use his hands for what he wanted again.

“They’re dead now.”

“Yes.”

Will pressed a soft kiss to Hannibal’s jaw.

“Were you ever tempted?” he asked.

Hannibal stopped his movements to avoid making a mistake, and closed his eyes for a moment.

“Never.”

Will chuckled, low. It rumbled against Hannibal’s spine and prompted him to open his eyes again. He began moving again, wanting to finish as soon as possible.

“You wouldn’t lie to me, would you, Doctor Lecter?” Will asked.

Hannibal focused on keeping his breathing even.

“I never have.”

Will set his chin on Hannibal’s shoulder, apparently content to stop teasing him so much for the moment. He just watched as Hannibal went through the final steps of their design.

“I know.”

“So, *this* is your regular house,” Will mused, walking through the foyer, “you’re lucky I never investigated you while I was still an agent. Your decor is just morbid enough to have made me suspicious.”

Hannibal smiled, hanging up his coat.

“Perhaps, though if you had encephalitis at the time, I may have been able to convince you not to worry.”

Will hummed in consideration, looking back to Hannibal as he lifted his hands to pull on the lapels of Hannibal’s suit. It was intoxicating to be able to be so near Will so often after having been separated and forbidden to touch for so long. Hannibal hoped he never got used to it.

“But then we wouldn’t be here,” Will said, his tone low and his pupils wide again.

Hannibal smiled and ducked his head. He caught Will’s lips in a kiss, relishing the feeling. He just wanted.

Will laughed.

“Bedroom?” he asked.

Hannibal had the urge to pick Will up into his arms and carry him all the way to the bed. He was confident he would be able to do it, but he wondered if Will would allow it. Will would certainly be able to put up a fight if he *didn’t* want to.

Hannibal kicked Will’s legs out from under him and caught him, scooping him up into his arms.

Will huffed in surprise as Hannibal moved toward the stairs. He bit the column of Hannibal’s throat, just enough to sting.

“Reckless,” he whispered into Hannibal’s skin.

Hannibal smiled, pressing a kiss to Will’s perfect curls.

“Impatient,” Hannibal corrected.

Once they were in the bedroom, the door closed behind them, Hannibal dropped Will softly onto the mattress.

Will grinned up at him, batting his eyelashes and gesturing for him to come closer. Hannibal obliged, slipping out of his shoes and coming up to stand at the edge of the bed. Will moved faster than Hannibal expected, pulling him down to the mattress and rolling so Will was above him, straddling his hips. Will slowly began to undo Hannibal's tie, and Hannibal allowed him to, watching in awe as the beautiful creature smirked.

"Good things come to those who wait, Doctor," Will chided, pulling the silk from Hannibal's collar with a flourish.

"God helps those who help themselves," Hannibal retorted, placing his hand on Will's waist, matching where Will had been holding him during the work on Chilton.

Will huffed.

"You don't believe in god," he laughed.

Hannibal pulled him down into another rough kiss, desperate for more of Will.

"Then make me believe."

Confused

Chapter Summary

Changing POVs

Jack was not happy.

He knew most of the people who met him were sure he was never happy. As untrue as that was, there were times he found himself believing it too.

Frederick Chilton had been found. His body had been mutilated in a fashion that Jack had never seen before. It was surgical, precise, artistic, but incredibly... emotional.

It was the Ripper. He was sure of it. Despite how sure he was of that, he questioned something about it. The Ripper was never emotional in his killings. In his displays, he was always clinically detached and objectively artistic. This was his, but it was new.

Jack didn't want to address the thought that niggled at the back of his mind. He didn't want to even consider the possibility.

Will Graham was working with the Chesapeake Ripper.

That would mean that the Ripper had helped him escape. It would mean they had probably communicated before the escape. It would mean Will knew who it was, while he was consulting on the case. It would mean he had purposefully withheld information. It would mean the Ripper *liked* Will, in whatever capacity.

What Jack was looking at was a perfect melding of minds between the Ripper and Will Graham. The technique was Ripper, but the picture was Will.

Obviously, Jack was not happy.

Alana Bloom had insisted on coming to see. She had wanted to help, in Hannibal's absence, and Jack knew she was also curious.

He felt it had been a mistake when he saw the first tear fall down her cheek. Her eyes were red, and her chin quivered. This was crushing her hopes that Will was just damaged. It was destroying her perception of someone who was genuinely good, but had just been ruined by the work, and the world. She wouldn't be able to be blind after this, and she was feeling the full ramifications of that.

"I'm sorry, Jack," she said, choking a bit on the words, "I can't help you. I thought I could, but I'm too close. You should wait for Hannibal. I have to go."

Jack only nodded in silence, letting her walk away. He knew she didn't need him to try to comfort her, or reassure her. Even if that was what she wanted, he wasn't the one who could give it to her. He was dealing with the same kind of crushing realizations, bet he knew they would be handling it in very different ways.

Alana drove to Hannibal's house.

She knew it was rude to show up uninvited, but she also knew he would forgive her after he heard her reason. He had come back from his vacation, and she just really needed someone to talk to.

Alana rang the bell and waited. She could feel the emotions building up inside her again, in the anticipation of talking about it at last.

Hannibal opened the door, and he looked annoyed. The expression softened immediately when he saw her, and was replaced with one of friendly concern.

"Doctor Bloom," he said.

Alana smiled, but she felt a tear threaten to fall down her cheek. She wiped it away quickly.

"I'm sorry I didn't call first," she said, feeling how tense her voice was, "Is it a bad time?"

She could see the internal debate Hannibal had with himself, and it was weird. She had never seen him hesitate before.

"My home is always open to friends," he said at last, stepping aside to let her in, "would you like something to drink?"

Alana smiled, feeling relief wash over her. She had been worried, just for a second, that Hannibal would actually turn her away. She should have known he wouldn't. He was too polite and kind.

"Probably tea would be the best bet," she said, "I'm not in the best place right now."

Hannibal looked over her assessingly, seeming to agree with that statement. He nodded and led her into the kitchen and started making the tea for her. She smiled, feeling comforted at the familiar situation.

"Is there something you would like to talk about?" Hannibal asked after a moment, "I presume you did not come here simply to ask for tea."

Alana laughed bitterly, nodding and wiping away another tear.

"It's Will. You know he escaped, right?"

Hannibal nodded somberly.

“Jack informed me. I hope to be some help to him tomorrow, when I return to helping him.”

Alana nodded again.

“It was the Ripper,” she said, feeling despair sink into her bones, “The Ripper ambushed the van. He’s with the Ripper now.”

Hannibal paused in his movements, glancing up at her.

“What has happened?” he asked.

Alana sighed, feeling the tears fall freely now.

“We found Fredrick’s body,” she confided, “Jack and I are in agreement. It looks like they are working together.”

Hannibal nodded softly, pouring a cup of tea and handing it to her.

“I understand that must be hard for you to be dealing with. You had faith in Will, even while he was incarcerated.”

Alana nodded, wiping the tears away angrily.

“I was in denial,” she said, “I know I was. I should have known he wasn’t as innocent as I wanted to believe. I was just blind.”

Hannibal reached out and took her hand, comforting her with the contact.

“In your defense, many of us were blinded by him,” he offered, “Will is intelligent, and perhaps more clever than anyone knew.”

Alana huffed a soft laugh, almost scoffing, half sobbing.

“Fredrick always tried to tell us,” she said, “he always told us Will was playing games with us. Maybe Will is trying to show us he was right, by killing him.”

Hannibal hummed softly.

“Perhaps,” he agreed.

“Well?” Will asked, sighing and laying back in the bed.

Will had insisted Hannibal answer the door, and act as usual to avoid suspicion. Hannibal had wanted to argue, but he knew it would have done no good. If he had not answered the door, that could have been a reason for whoever it was to be concerned on his behalf. Jack thought he was in danger from Will, after all.

“It was Alana Bloom,” Hannibal replied, shedding his clothes again and walking over to the bed, “she is quite upset after seeing our work. She is coming to the realization that she has

been wrong about you all these years."

Will chuckled. He reached up and pulled Hannibal down to the bed with him.

"How do they know I had anything to do with it?" he asked.

Hannibal sighed at the feeling of Will's warm skin against his own again.

"From what I could gather, they recognize the unique imagery that comes with your imagination, though they admit it was my hand that created it."

Will grinned and pulled Hannibal into a kiss.

"Have you been asked to consult on it?"

Hannibal smiled in return, mirroring Will's expression.

"I'll be going in tomorrow, though I expect they have already moved him. What a shame I will not be allowed to see the scene through their eyes," he answered.

Will hummed.

"What's the plan?" he asked.

Hannibal nuzzled along Will's jaw, wishing they didn't have to have a plan beyond this, just for a moment.

"I give them a psychological write up. I refer all my patients to other therapists. I show you Florence."

Will laughed.

"Merci, mon coeur," he said, slipping into french seamlessly, though Hannibal could hear the Cajun accent that changed the sounds slightly, "but maybe France first. I know French already, and I'd rather not go directly to somewhere I don't know the language."

Hannibal hummed, content, but knowing Will wanted him to reply.

"Your accent may garner you more enemies than friends," he responded, in french to match Will.

Will rolled them so Hannibal was beneath him once again, and shook his head.

"A shame. Whatever will we do about that?"

Images

Hannibal felt it was a great injustice that the display of Chilton's body had been disassembled this way. It no longer looked as meaningful and elegant as it had when Will had helped him place the finishing touches to the scene.

It had been a wonderful portrayal of Prometheus Bound, having his internal organs ripped from his abdomen, his liver taken, and his limbs chained to a large rock. It had been Will's idea, of course, and Hannibal admired everything about it.

"What do you think, Doctor Lecter?" Jack asked.

Hannibal thought many things, and knew the agents would never understand most of them. He was uniquely fortunate to have someone who not only understood what he saw, but had the ability to create and perfect images in his head as well.

"The punishment of Prometheus," Hannibal stated, walking around the body to study it better, though he knew it very well already, "A gift to mortals, as the betrayal of the gods, led to his eternal punishment. He was chained to the side of a mountain, and cursed to have eagles eat his liver every day, only for it to grow back and be eaten the next."

Jack sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"So, what does that mean here?" he asked, his tone more demanding than he had ever used with Hannibal, "It looks like the Ripper and Will are working together to me. Am I wrong?"

Hannibal shook his head.

"You are not wrong, Jack. This is clearly the design of Will Graham, but it has the same trademarks and precision as the Ripper. This is a message from Will, through the Ripper, to you."

Jack folded his arms, staring at the body with hate, though Hannibal wondered if it was directed at Chilton or himself.

"What's he trying to say?"

Hannibal let the question hang in the air for a moment before he answered.

"Fredrick has betrayed the gods, to benefit mortals. This is his punishment. I think, if Will had the ability to, he would have given him the same curse Prometheus suffered. This is the nearest he could, and it serves as a warning to others. Do not betray the gods."

Jack seemed to be slowly deflating, seeming exhausted and defeated.

"Who are the gods?" he asked weakly, though they all knew what the answer was.

"Will Graham, and the Chesapeake Ripper," Hannibal answered frankly.

And Hannibal had never felt more godlike than when Will had been working alongside him. When they moved as one, and were essentially the same entity. There was nothing in the universe to compare to the perfect unity of mind and purpose that they possessed. The perfect understanding they had of each other.

The ancient gods may not have been perfect, but the new ones were.

“How was work?” Will asked, grinning brightly as Hannibal walked in.

Will was standing at the kitchen counter, pouring glasses of wine for them both. He was wearing the red sweater Hannibal had given him, and he looked perfect.

It was almost jarring, how domestic the situation was. It was reminiscent of what most people aspired to have. A job they enjoyed, and a loved one to come home to.

Hannibal had never felt the desire to have anyone else inhabit the same space as himself. He had never wanted someone to come and live in his house, be there when he wasn’t, and be there when he came back home. He had never considered it worth his time and effort to gain, and he saw no benefit in having it if he had. There had been no reason for him to want someone else in his life.

Will didn’t feel like someone in his life. He *was* life. He *was* Hannibal. Hannibal couldn’t exist without Will, now that he knew life with him. Any life apart from Will would feel hollow and empty.

Hannibal pulled Will into a kiss, feeling the sudden need to occupy the same space as the other man, and breathe the same air.

Will reciprocated, smiling into the kiss and likely knowing exactly what thoughts were running through Hannibal’s mind at the moment. He held handfuls of Hannibal’s suit and used his grip on the fabric to pull Hannibal even more, impossibly close.

“That bad?” Will asked, laughing as they parted, “Maybe I should have opened a bottle of something stronger than wine.”

Hannibal hummed, rubbing his cheek against Will’s and feeling the smooth skin where he was keeping it clean shaved. He was eternally glad Will was so tactile, because he found himself strangely inclined to the same when it came to Will. No one else had ever earned his adoring touch in this way.

“Would you believe me if I said being without you is nearly unbearable?” Hannibal asked.

Will laughed again, pulling away and retrieving the wine glasses. He handed one to Hannibal and took a thoughtful sip.

“I assume you have had to talk to Jack quite a bit today,” he mused, “so the feeling probably stems from the torture of being misunderstood constantly for the last four hours or more. Add

to that the fact that you had to purposefully mislead the agents who are investigating us both, and I'd say separation will get easier when we actually make it to Europe."

Hannibal hummed in disagreement and caged Will against the counter, nuzzling along his jaw and taking deep breaths of him.

"Admit it," Will teased, keeping up with the charade, "you'll be able to ingratiate yourself into circles of intellectuals who are much closer to matching you in talent, and everything will be more to your taste. You won't even look at me when we go anywhere. You will be too taken with the architecture or something."

Hannibal bit down on Will's throat, earning an involuntary gasp. He felt Will beginning to grow warmer, and they both set down their glasses on the counter, out of the way.

"You needn't agitate me," Hannibal warned, "If you want something, you need only ask."

Will laughed again, and Hannibal was glad that the sound was becoming more regular with every day they spent together.

"What would be the fun in that, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal hummed, running his hands up under the sweater Will was wearing. He wanted. He wanted to touch, to take. He wanted so much.

"Have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will?" he asked.

Will huffed a soft laugh, apparently surprised by the turn of conversation.

"As a matter of fact, I haven't," he answered.

Hannibal wasn't sure he believed it, sure Will would have answered that way just to please him, whether it was true or not. Regardless, he was pleased.

"Would you like to?"

Will had taken a bit more convincing than Hannibal had anticipated, but he had chosen their prey well. He knew the type Will preferred, and had picked someone they could agree didn't deserve to live.

Professor Tartin worked at the university where Hannibal had found both Carson and Matthis. During his research into the boys, Hannibal had found that he was taking advantage of the more sensitive students. Carson, particularly, had experienced his manipulations several times.

"I'd like to have met Carson, I think," Will said as they waited.

Hannibal hummed, looking Will over. He was staring out the window of the car, his gaze unfocused and his mind clearly elsewhere.

“But not Matthis?” Hannibal asked.

Will grimaced.

“No. Not Matthis.”

Hannibal smirked slightly, unable to stop it. Will was glorious in all things, even when Hannibal didn’t understand where his ire originated from.

“You have never explained why you despise him so,” Hannibal said, “you were initially so open to playing our game with him.”

Will huffed. He didn’t look over at Hannibal, but he set his jaw firmly and hesitated to answer.

“I was jealous.”

Hannibal smiled, watching as Will fought with himself over whatever he was thinking and feeling at the moment.

“You needn’t have been,” Hannibal answered.

Will turned and glared at Hannibal, his eyes nearly glowing in the low light. His anger was radiant.

“You *never* had to worry that I had someone else. I couldn’t do *anything* for myself. I only had Chilton, and you. You were free to mingle with whomever you chose, and I couldn’t do *anything* about it. I couldn’t even know what you were doing. Maybe I’m more possessive over you than I have any reason to be, but I was angry that *he* was allowed to earn your interest while I was still stuck where I was. For all I knew, you might have grown bored of me, like a goldfish, while he was still interesting to you.”

Will was angry. He was angry, and it was beautiful. Hannibal couldn’t take his eyes off of him, and it was seeming to aggravate Will further.

“We can talk about it more after we do this,” Will decided after a moment, seeming to shove his emotions away and turn back to the present, “You shouldn’t try to make me angry with you right now, or someone who should *actually* die tonight might get away.”

Presentation

Hannibal often found himself standing by as he watched things happen. When other people acted, he was rarely participating in any discernible way. If he had any part in them, it was indirectly, influencing others gently, curious to see what would happen.

That being said, Hannibal wanted to be a part of what was happening.

Will had been adamant that Professor Tartin be allowed to fight back. He enjoyed the physical aspect of hand to hand combat. He had also insisted that after so long in the prison, he was craving a good old fashioned fight.

The only thing Hannibal had been allowed to do was help subdue and transport Tartin to a place where Will could relatively safely engage him. At least safely in the sense where they would not be discovered. Once they had arrived, Will had insisted on setting his prey loose and, in essence, hunting him on foot.

It wasn't Hannibal's taste, but how desperately he wanted to join Will as he stalked the man through the trees was surprising to him. He had seen Will's eyes flash nearly silver the moment he had set off, reflecting the moonlight like a calm pond. He had taken off in a different direction from Tartin, as if he knew where the man would end up, and his footsteps had been nearly silent on the forest floor. Hannibal wanted to be beside him and watch Will hunt, like the beautiful predator he was.

Will had asked him to stay behind, though. He had been polite, and almost shy about the request, as if it were something he had wanted, but was worried about making Hannibal feel unwanted. It was not often Will acted unsure in front of Hannibal, even now, and he had not had the heart to deny him the request.

Hannibal watched the tree line as the minutes stretched on. He could hear movements of the trees, and the wildlife of the night.

There was a shout, and Hannibal stared off in the direction it came from. It was not Will's voice. It was the voice of the prey.

After a few more minutes, Hannibal heard approaching footsteps. They were hurried, and they were paired with gasping breaths of someone exerting themselves while frightened. It must have been Tartin.

The man burst through the trees, and Will was nowhere in sight. Hannibal wasn't sure what Will had planned, so he just watched. The man set his eyes on the car, and headed toward it with singular purpose, glancing around and gasping for air. He didn't seem to notice Hannibal, who was leaning against the front of the dark car, dressed in dark clothes.

When the man was about ten feet from the car, and Hannibal, Will reappeared. He darted from the trees with almost inhuman speed, feet still light on the ground and nearly silent. He couldn't be heard approaching over the gasping breaths of the prey.

Will grabbed the man by the back of his clothes and pulled hard, tossing him like a rag doll into a nearby tree. The man was small, but still a full grown man. It must have taken great strength to throw him so far. Hannibal had not yet learned the true strength of the man he was completely infatuated with.

Hannibal heard the air leave Tartin's lungs in a rush when he hit the tree, and Will advanced on the man again.

Will was upon him, grabbing him by the throat and kicking his knee hard enough to break it and make his leg bend the opposite way. The crunch resounded through the night and the man screamed, though it was muffled by his lack of air. Will dragged the man away from the trees again, pulling him along the ground and coming up to five feet in front of Hannibal.

Will's eyes shone electric blue as he lifted the man by the shoulder, with one hand fisted into Tartin's hair to pull his head back and tip it back to expose his neck. Will made direct eye contact with Hannibal and sank his teeth into the exposed flesh. He snapped away, pulling a chunk of flesh away with his teeth and letting blood pour out from the wound all over him.

Will spit the piece of skin out onto the ground and dropped the dying man on top of it. Will hadn't taken his eyes off of Hannibal as he moved, and kept eye contact as he stepped over Tartin and right up to him. Blood dripped down his chin and neck, far more radiant and beautiful now, in the moonlight than it had been on screen.

Will looked up at Hannibal, smiling with the same bright teeth and glittering eyes he had been fixated by since first laying his gaze on the man.

Will licked his lips slowly and then took hold of Hannibal's tie and pulled.

Will pulled him into a kiss that tasted of blood and adrenaline. Hannibal licked the blood from Will's lips, then his jaw and neck. He was as intoxicated by the taste as by the sight and the essence of the man. The vision before him was as enticing as the feeling of Will's skin against his own. Every sensation was bliss when it came to Will Graham, and Hannibal would willingly drown in it.

"Hannibal."

Hannibal froze, pulling back and staring at Will in awe.

Will had never said his name before. Hannibal had all but resolved to never hear those honeyed lips say the word. The sound of his voice saying the one thing Hannibal had wanted to hear from him since first hearing the smooth tone weave enchantments in the air like so many threads of meaning.

"Will," he replied, feeling his tone low and husky despite himself.

Will smiled, looking genuinely happy.

"This one was for you," he purred, pleased as a contented cat laying in a Sunday morning sunbeam, "for all you've done. I'm finally who I am again. Oh god, I forgot how good this

feels. I'm never going back to that place. Chilton might have been one hell of a terrible shrink, but he sure did do a number on my mental state. Hannibal, I swear if we ever get caught I'm taking us both out to avoid that again."

Hannibal smiled, feeling his heart fill with adoration and desire. The man before him was pure perfection, and there was nothing to separate them now.

"Do you believe you could kill me, Will?" Hannibal asked, pulling the man closer and knowing blood was seeping into his clothes. He was beyond caring about trivial things like that.

Will considered it, licking more blood from his fingers and humming as he mulled over the taste and question.

"Depends, do you plan on fighting me, Hannibal?" he asked in return, pressing closer.

Hannibal kissed Will again, knowing he would never get over the effect it had on him when Will said his name. It was too sacred a thing to become used to.

"Perhaps not, if you continue to use my name on your sinful lips," he replied honestly.

Will laughed.

"Then let's hope we are both good at covering our tracks so it never comes to that."

Hannibal agreed, and Will pulled him toward the body.

"I hope you have a plan for how to prepare him," Will said, "and I don't mean a display. I want this one to be a gift directly from me to Agent Crawford."

Hannibal nodded, pulling out his surgical bag from under the car where Will had slid it for easy access. Will had the uncanny ability to see ahead enough to prepare for what would happen down to the slightest details. Hannibal adored it.

"I have a cooler and packaging supplies in the trunk," he provided, watching as Will retrieved the items.

Will looked dangerous and confident. He looked how Hannibal had seen him in the prison. He had power and freedom now, and was able to move around in the world as he wished. Hannibal would do everything in his power to make sure Will wished for nothing more than him. Will might have worried before that Hannibal would stray, but Hannibal would make sure neither of them were separated from the other. Hannibal wanted no one else, and Will would never have anyone else to want if Hannibal had any say in the matter.

"Have a few recipes in mind?" Will asked, kissing Hannibal behind the ear as he set the cooler and packages down next to him.

Hannibal hummed as he took the preferred pieces of flesh from the body.

"Of course," he replied, working quickly in the dark, "only the best for you, Will."

Will hummed happily and allowed Hannibal to work without interference this time. He just watched and waited.

“And you have a design already,” he stated.

Will nodded lazily.

“I’ll need that muzzle,” Will replied, “I know you have it. Don’t think I’m not aware you have it. You went back and got it the first chance you got. I want this message to be clear enough Jack will get it without your help.”

Hannibal sighed lightly, more for show than anything.

“I had hoped to keep it,” he said honestly, “it is something I rather like.”

Will laughed softly and lifted a hand to play with a few strands of Hannibal’s hair. It was not something the man had done before, but the killing of Tartin had seemed to give him a new clarity of mind and confidence boost, at least for the moment.

“I know you liked it,” Will said, “I knew that the moment you set eyes on it. The same way you like when I wear suits and put product in my hair to accentuate the curls. The same way I like when you have blood on your hands and I’m the reason.”

Hannibal wished Will would not be so distracting, but at the same time he adored it.

“I do not have a say in whether you use it for this or not,” Hannibal concluded.

Will grinned and kissed him.

“Not in the least.”

Compromise

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will leaned over the counter, watching Hannibal work, with his chin in his hands and his elbows on the counter top. His eyelids were low and he seemed mildly frustrated that Hannibal was intent on his task and not distracted by the vision he was creating.

In all honesty, Hannibal was utilizing every ounce of his self-restraint to not sink his hands into Will's hair and pull him into a kiss over the counter. He knew he would never finish the food if he allowed himself to give into the temptation at this point.

"What are you making?" Will asked, letting the words drip from his mouth like warm molasses.

"Tartines," Hannibal answered simply, having to keep his answer short in order to not let Will hear the tenseness in his voice.

Will burst into laughter, dropping his head so it almost hit the counter before he threw it back and faced the ceiling as he laughed. Hannibal closed his eyes and breathed slowly to keep from dropping the food onto the floor.

"You had that planned since you met the man, didn't you?" Will asked, finding inexplicable joy in Hannibal's decision, "Oh my god, Hannibal. You are the cheesiest Cannibal in existence. I can't believe you have survived this long, all the while flirting with the FBI."

Hannibal shook his head, his own lips stretching into a smile despite himself. There was something about Will's joy that Hannibal couldn't help but share. Something genuine about how he showed his emotions now that Hannibal hadn't had the chance to see before. Will had always been behind a mask before. They both were.

"Remarkably, I have never been so much as suspected by the FBI," he replied, "and I am greatly entertained by my flirtations with them. Keep your friends close."

Will let out a low chuckle, still amused.

"And your enemies closer," he finished, "but the FBI doesn't really stand by that, incidentally. They are blind to their own blindness. That's what preserved us both, I suppose. Me for only a short amount of time, though."

Hannibal looked at Will curiously. He had been wondering for some time about the exact nature of Will's becoming, but he had not yet had the chance to ask. There were some things he had yet to understand.

"Do you blame your illness for your new mentality concerning death?" he asked, the best wording he had at the moment.

Will tipped his head, considering it. He wet his lips and blinked slowly.

“I was this way before the encephalitis,” Will answered after a pause, “but I wanted to hide it. I wanted to exterminate this part of me. Jack probably told you I was different after the Shrike case, and that’s true. That was the first time I killed anyone, and I felt my walls breaking. I had enjoyed it, and I was having a hard time hiding that fact. I wanted to kill again, but I was working on saving lives, so I couldn’t allow myself to act on the impulse. The encephalitis just broke down the walls the rest of the way and allowed me to act how I have always wanted. I was freed from morality, in a way.”

Hannibal smiled. It was refreshing to know Will did not harbor any doubts about his true nature. He did not have to worry that Will would decide he was not meant to be this way.

“But not completely,” he noted.

Will huffed a soft laugh.

“No,” he agreed, “not completely. You know my preferred prey. I killed a few agents that came to take me in, but on the whole I prefer to kill people who really deserve it. I know we don’t share that mentality.”

There was an unspoken question at the end of Will’s statement. He was curious, but afraid to put a voice to his doubts.

Do you still want me if I’m not like you?

Hannibal heard the words as if they had been spoken aloud. He knew Will’s fear, because it mirrored his own. There was logically no reason Will should choose Hannibal, whose moral compass consisted of very few things that are unacceptable, and anything else was fair game. Will Graham was a vibrantly righteous individual, despite all the sins the world saw fit to plaster to him. He was resolute and upstanding as a human being. Hannibal was nothing less than a monster.

Hannibal considered what he should say in order to help them both come to an understanding as he plated the tartines. Surely, there was some way he could voice his thoughts without adding to Will’s doubts, or causing him to decide he was making a mistake by staying.

They sat at the table in silence. Each of them likely thinking along similar lines as to what should be said next.

“Compromises are easily made, and are often seen as a sign of successful communication within a relationship,” Hannibal said at last, deciding that attacking the issue logically would be the best route.

Will laughed, interrupting Hannibal before he could continue.

“You’re offering to only kill people I approve of?” Will said, still laughing, “Why, Doctor Lecter. I never thought I’d see the day someone put restrictions on you. You would shackle yourself for me, but what would you ask for in return? A compromise is two sided, Doctor.”

Hannibal was caught off guard by Will's words, and the light in his eyes as he spoke. There was nothing more breathtaking than the sight of Will Graham when he was pleased, aside from when he was terribly angry.

"I would ask that you not hide your true thoughts from me," Hannibal said softly, "whether you be angry with me for some slight, or whatever may be. I would ask you to be honest, and I will be in return. I do not wish for another circumstance like Matthis to occur."

Will blinked, apparently also taken aback by what the other had said. He sat back in his chair and stared off into nothingness. He hummed softly as he thought, pressing his lips together.

"What you are asking could be dangerous," Will said distantly, as if he were not wholly in the moment, "and I don't know what may happen."

Hannibal nodded and took a bite of his tartine. He knew very well that Will's emotions were volatile, and should be treated with care. Just as any curious cat, though, he relied on the satisfaction of knowing the truth to keep him alive.

"You need not decide right in this moment," Hannibal said, "Dinner should not be spoilt by your uncertainty."

Will nodded, blinking and coming back to reality. He took a bite of his own tartine and smiled with a light huff.

"Tartin tartines," he mused.

"What is this?" Jack asked, desperate for Hannibal to make sense of the scene before him.

Will's message had been received, but Jack was in denial about what it said.

"It is a message of thanks, and of warning," Hannibal replied, "for you, Jack. This is from Will. Surely you understand what he means by it."

Jack stared at the body. Tartin's throat exposed with the chunk of flesh missing from it where Will had bitten and torn. The cuts of meat absent from his body in an uncharacteristically clean removal for someone like Will Graham. The mask that was fastened onto his head, a testament to what Will had been through and who he now was.

"It's a promise," Jack concluded, his voice almost a whisper. He was scared of the words coming from his own mouth, "Will does not intend to be caught again, and he is going to do us all a favor by taking out scumbags like this. The local police have been trying to nail this guy, but no one would ever testify against him."

Hannibal nodded in agreement. They both knew it said much more than that, but neither of them would voice it. There were some things that were best unsaid.

The corpse had his chest and abdomen opened, the cuts clean but not surgical. Will had insisted he do the entire thing, and Hannibal had been happy enough to let him. One of the

man’s lungs had been replaced with his liver, and his stomach had been literally tied in a knot. It was skillful work, and Hannibal admired the message it would send.

It was cruel, perhaps, for Will to direct part of his message at Jack’s wife. He did not want to cause the man pain so much as force him to pay attention. He knew things he had no way of knowing, and told Jack that there should not be any action taken against him. Jack had a dying wife to worry about, and should not put his life in the line.

Will knew, of course, that Jack would have to come after him eventually. That was part of the reason he had given the warning. He was giving Jack permission to chase him, but requested a head start so Jack could stay alive. He had betrayed Will once before, and Will was trusting him to not make that mistake again.

As Hannibal watched the countenance of the man before him, he knew Will had played his cards correctly. Jack would take his time, giving them a few months before he started really trying to catch Will. They would be well into Europe by that time, and Jack would be none the wiser.

There was no reason to suspect Hannibal would know where Will was, where he intended to go, or who he was with. Hannibal had already put into motion his plans to travel, and there would be nothing to suggest Will was a part of it.

Everything was going according to plan.

Chapter End Notes

This fic probably only has a few more chapters in it. I'm not running out of ideas, per se, but I'm sensing the story coming to a close at last. We'll see how much it has left in it soon enough.

Thanks for reading.

Papers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will studied his passport, his face perfectly blank as he read his temporary name.

“Magnus LeBlanc?” he asked, clearly unconvinced.

Hannibal couldn’t help the small smile that pulled at his lips as he returned Will’s gaze.

“A common last name for those who live in Louisiana,” he offered in explanation, “which is a role I am fairly confident you can fill with some level of accuracy.”

Will raised an eyebrow in challenge at the words. Hannibal knew the statement would earn him some form of retaliation, and he couldn’t deny that he was terribly curious to see what Will considered to be appropriate.

Will set the passport aside, his gaze burning into Hannibal as the man continued to sort through the papers they would need in order to properly travel to Europe. He was still working on convincing Will to go to Florence instead of France, but the man was determined and Hannibal was aware of his own weakness when it came to him.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you enjoy antagonizing me,” Will said, his voice drawling out in a southern accent that made Hannibal consciously steady his breathing.

Hannibal hummed, pretending to be distracted by the contents of the documents in his hands. Will would win too easily if Hannibal allowed himself to be manipulated by his small decisions. Hannibal was already aware he was extremely prone to giving Will whatever he wanted, even without the other man doing anything to convince him. It was his curse, desiring to shower Will in only the finest things and experiences. Hannibal wanted to give Will whatever he wanted, which was beginning to be a problem, as the other man was taking advantage.

Will stood up and came around the table so he was standing next to Hannibal. Hannibal kept his eyes on the papers, though his focus was entirely on Will and his movements.

Will knelt down, putting one of his hands on Hannibal’s knee and staring up at him. Hannibal sighed and relented, putting down the paper and turning to face Will. His attention was captured by Will’s fathomless blue eyes, that seemed so dark they could swallow the earth if he chose.

Will took one of Hannibal’s hands in his and kissed the veins in his wrist. It was an action Hannibal had directed at Will many times, but it nearly caused Hannibal to lose his balance at the sight. Will so rarely showed affection through small actions like this, despite the fact that Hannibal did often.

“Care to explain yourself, Doctor Lecter?” Will asked, continuing in his southern drawl.

Hannibal swallowed, knowing he was once again being manipulated into giving Will what he wanted.

“I find you capable of exquisite things, Will Graham,” he offered softly, letting his hand rest against Will’s cheek, “and your ability to surprise me is among the best. I admit to creating reasons for you to surprise me, solely for the experience.”

Will nipped at Hannibal’s thumb playfully, keeping their gazes locked.

“Well, I mustn’t disappoint,” Will said, “but wouldn’t someone from Louisiana, who knows French, be more likely to travel to France than to Italy?”

Hannibal pretended to consider his argument.

“Not necessarily,” he said, “especially if that person knows their Cajun accent sounds absolutely revolting to most native French speakers. You do not strike me as the ignorant type, Magnus.”

Will’s eyes flashed harsh green at his fake name, and he let his canine sink into the pad of Hannibal’s thumb to the point where it almost hurt. A small act of retaliation.

“Would you prefer I call you Monsieur LeBlanc?” Hannibal asked softly, earning a soft snarl from the man.

Will rose so he was looming over Hannibal in his seat. He leaned over so their noses brushed, closing his eyes and letting his lashes flutter over his cheeks in a way Hannibal found absolutely breathtaking.

“I would prefer you make your argument for Florence with all the passion you feel for it. I know how much you want it, but I want you to convince me. Tell me. Make me feel how much you want it. Make it so there is no room in my mind to argue, until I want it too.”

Hannibal pulled Will down into his lap and kissed him violently.

So that was the game. Will didn’t really want to go to France. He wanted Hannibal to win. He just wanted Hannibal to earn it.

Well, Hannibal was determined to do everything in his power to earn it.

Will grinned as they walked through the airport together, rubbing his fingers absently over the bite mark behind his jaw. Hannibal had made and defended his case well enough that Will had finally agreed, and they were on their way to Florence.

As they walked to the waiting area and took their seats, Hannibal saw Will’s gaze catch on someone and his smile fade. Will seemed distracted by whatever he saw, and Hannibal followed his gaze to a woman sitting across from them.

“What is it, love?” Hannibal asked, in French to keep from being overheard.

Will furrowed his brow and tilted his chin towards the woman.

“She’s abusive,” He replied curtly, matching Hannibal with his own French.

Hannibal looked back over at the woman and studied her. There was nothing he could see that revealed her violent nature, but he trusted that Will was being honest.

“What would you like to do about that?” Hannibal asked.

Will watched her for a few more minutes without answering. There was a bright intelligence crackling behind his eyes, and Hannibal admired it as he waited.

“She’s going to be on the same plane as us,” Will noted quietly, “and it would be fairly easy to follow her. She’s a tourist, she’s travelling alone, and they go missing all the time. It would be easy to have her drop off the face of the earth.”

Hannibal hummed in thought.

“You believe she deserves that?” he asked, running his fingers through Will’s hair absently.

Will turned and met his gaze.

“She’s abusive to children and animals,” he stated, “so I do.”

Hannibal smiled and kissed Will gently.

“Then we will certainly do something about that, love. Whatever you wish. I really must begin teaching you Italian, though.”

Will snorted and shook his head.

“I’m not sociable, so you’ll be doing most of the talking whether I know the language or not. Lucky for you, I learn quickly and have a very, very good memory.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement and they sat in comfortable silence as they waited to board the plane.

Everything went off without a hitch, and Will even managed to make a good impression on all the people he ended up interacting with. He easily showed off his southern accent, and even spoke in French to a few curious people who noticed it and asked. He played the part extremely well, and Hannibal felt a swell of pride as he watched it all.

It would be a lie if Hannibal claimed the sound of Will’s voice with the southern drawl did not inspire a feeling of intense desire in his gut. He wished they were already in Florence so he could drag Will to their hotel room and make him forget his own name.

As it was, they had a very long flight ahead of them, and a kill to plan out. Will had already chosen a victim, which let Hannibal know he would not be suffering for want of

entertainment during their travels. He had worried Will would not be quite so amenable to the idea, but it seemed he was entirely and righteously intent on cleansing the world with fire. His justice burned, and Hannibal would welcome the pain just to glimpse the glory of him in the midst.

They spoke in hushed French about what they would do when they reached their destination, and Hannibal took every opportunity to kiss Will’s perfect lips. He had never felt so much affection and adoration for anyone in his life, and he would let Will know exactly how much reverence and devotion he inspired in Hannibal. At every opportunity, Hannibal would let him know he was worshiped and adored.

Will began to grow impatient as he was interrupted frequently by the kisses, but he would soften again when Hannibal smiled warmly at him, and they would continue conversing. Will was not the only one who knew how to manipulate the other, and Hannibal was not the only one who had a weakness. They would always have to carefully balance their manipulations and be sure they caused no harm, but they would never stop completely.

It was almost as if that had become the way they told the other they loved them. They would carefully manipulate the other, and get what they wanted, and be manipulated in return. As long as it was reciprocated, they knew they were safe with each other.

It was a twisted type of love, and one that an outsider would likely label toxic or unhealthy, but it was theirs, and they couldn't’ be more happy. The whole world would burn around them, but they would remain, and nothing could stop them.

Chapter End Notes

The end.

Jk. I'm writing an epilogue, but this is the last actual chapter. Everything is just wrapping up nicely, and I'm ready to start working on something new. I hope you have all enjoyed the journey.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

> Mutual, consensual pain infliction. I'm not sure what exactly is going on, so I don't know how to warn you properly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Is this necessary?” Will asked, though he was not actually complaining. He strained against the ropes that held him in place as Hannibal sterilized his blade, just to test the security.

“I decided once that I would prove to the world that you are mine, if I have to brand my name into your skin to do it,” Hannibal replied, making sure the area between Will’s shoulder blades was clean and sanitized, “I find this a much more elegant solution, and even more satisfactory.”

Will flexed his muscles, making them roll under his skin as he waited for the inevitable.

“You’re so possessive, Doctor Lecter,” he purred, relaxing again and just waiting.

Hannibal flexed his own shoulders in the same way, feeling the sting of the mark Will had left in his skin.

“As are you,” he reminded.

Hannibal could almost feel the grin that split Will’s face at the words. He knew Will would be thinking of what he had carved with bold cuts into Hannibal’s skin just a bit earlier.

“Most people get rings,” Will said, arching as Hannibal began the first incision.

Hannibal hummed, bracing one hand on Will’s shoulder to steady his cuts.

“I fully intend to purchase rings for us,” he replied casually, “though I find this has a unique appeal to it. This is much more permanent, and the message even more clear.”

Will huffed a groan at the pain, but made no verbal complaint. They had discussed it beforehand, and the only reason Will was bound for the procedure was because he had confessed his instinct for self-preservation would likely override his decision once the process had begun.

Hannibal watched as Will’s muscles tensed and he strained against the bindings, and he admired the fact that Will had been able to predict his own response so well.

“These would be rather incriminating if anyone back home saw them,” Will noted, though his voice was strained with the pain.

Hannibal nodded, pressing a kiss to Will’s shoulder to offer some comfort.

“I do not intend for anyone to see these aside from ourselves,” he vowed.

Will laughed, but his pain was still clear in the sound. Hannibal was almost finished.

“If anyone does, they’ll die,” Will concluded.

Hannibal sighed, setting aside his tools and undoing Will’s bindings.

“You truly understand me as no one ever has,” he said fondly, brushing a stray curl of hair out of Will’s eyes.

Will hummed, closing his eyes and leaning fully against Hannibal.

“It’s a curse,” he teased.

Hannibal kissed the top of Will’s head. He cleaned up and set Will in bed to rest before he headed to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

Hannibal and Will now bore each other’s signatures in the most literal sense. Hannibal would be sure they would scar, leaving both of them permanently claimed. No one would have any right to touch either of them now, as they belonged exclusively to each other.

As Hannibal cooked the lady from the airport, making her more beautiful in death than she ever had been in life, he smiled to himself and relished the sting between his shoulders as he worked.

Chapter End Notes

And, that's officially the end of this tale. At least for now(dun dun dun).

I'm going to post the first chapter of a new fic on the first day of October. It has much more of a horror feel to it, so I wanted to have some posted in spooky month.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!